The Nabataean Trade Nation

The Public and Private Cultures of the Nabataean Kingdom

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by
Anna Accettola

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Waltham, Massachusetts

Abstract

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Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University
Waltham, Massachusetts

By Anna Accettola

This paper presents a theory of the Nabataean dichotomy between private and public culture. Through use of material culture and primary sources, a picture of the public façade of the Nabataean is created which shows that the Nabataean kingdom adopted attributes from foreign cultures that made it look more promising as a trading partner to its neighbors. This was especially important since the economic structure of the society was based on their ability to continue trade through the region. Examination of hydraulics, architecture, religion, language, numismatics, pottery, and statuary, show that while the public face of the kingdom was metropolitan and international, the private culture remained distinct and true to the traditional character of the Nabataean society. Because of the care with which the monumental structures adhered to this public façade, this dichotomy seems to have been deliberately created, although the proof for this claim is less than concrete because of the lack of surviving official documentation.

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Introduction

The shape of Nabataean culture has been examined, poked, prodded, and studied. Every discipline has an idea about some aspect of the whole culture, but rarely has someone tried to look at the broad spectrum of the evidence that remains from this kingdom and attempted to form some kind of cohesive theory. The purpose of this work is to make that attempt. Material culture is used alongside literary sources to create a theory about the public cultural façade of the Nabataean kingdom, which was deliberately used to facilitate peaceful dealings with neighboring kingdoms and promote trade through Nabataea. One of the most promising ways to understand truly this elusive culture is not only by examining one part of it, but also by trying to understand how all the pieces work together to reveal something more about this elusive people.

I feel that beginning with a history of the people is a necessary starting point, not to cover ground that can be found in many places, but because without understanding the earliest references, it becomes increasingly difficult to see how they changed and adapted to their surroundings. This history of the collective people is then bolstered by understanding the story of a man who epitomizes the Nabataean spirit, Syllaeus, the central figure of Chapter 2. Without an understanding of their nature, the more mechanical evidence for their adaptability is just a list of facts.

The history of the Nabataeans is also reflected in their material culture, which begins with their water systems, the earliest constructions done when they still lived a

nomadic life, which progressed rapidly as they became sedentary. Then, the creation of monumental structures, such as those at Petra, gives even more evidence to the Nabataean ability to take features of other cultures and mix them with their own unique character to create something new. But while monumental buildings may provide the largest number of examples of this commingling of styles and influences, the mix is also apparent in religion, pottery, figurines, and statuary. These more subtle or simply smaller-scale examples of foreign influences help to create a picture of a culture that had two faces, the public and the private. The public was necessary for continuing Nabataean trade and independence, while the private continued the traditions of the once nomadic culture.

The later chapters of this work concentrate on the language and coinage of the Nabataean kingdom. Both of these characteristics of the culture show its inclination to pull from foreign cultures in order to build a base for Nabataean trade and communication with neighboring kingdoms. Even though originally dependent on the ideas and forms of foreign cultures, the Nabataeans managed to use words and coins to create artifacts with unique properties that reflected their own traditions. The individuality of the Nabataean culture is shown through this work as being both separate and completely intertwined with its neighbors and trading partners.

Until the Roman Empire overcame its independence, the Nabataean culture managed to retain some of its nomadic past, even as its public façade altered and shifted in order to accommodate the pressures levied against it by its neighbors. Understanding the separation between public and private culture, however, requires looking past one single type of evidence and including many different pieces of remaining Nabataean

culture. Without doing so, it is difficult to understand what motivated the people and their reactions to the world around them.

Chapter 1
History and the Beginning of Trade

The control of trade routes was the main source of wealth for the Nabataean kingdom between the second century BCE and the end of the first century CE. In order to keep this control, the kingdom needed to be adaptable to external influences in order to promote trade relations with foreign entities. This adaptability created a dichotomy in the Nabataean culture—the public and the private. The public, or external, face changed to match the movement of power and influence outside the kingdom, including those changes brought by Hellenism and, later, the increasing presence of Rome. This side of the culture must have been at least partially governed by the ruling body of Nabataea, as it is most strongly reflected in the international parts of the kingdom, especially the capital city of Petra. The private, or internal, face, however, remained independent of these external influences and continued to hold close those traditions that were purely Nabataean. One of the main reasons for Nabataea's wealth, and even its independence, which lasted longer than any other Near Eastern kingdom, was its ability to blend with its foreign neighbors, while still maintaining its traditional core culture.

Nabataean culture remains in fragments, but, through interpretation of the pieces left, details about the kingdom come to light. One part of the Nabataean culture which causes it to stand apart from others of the time is the way in which the Nabataeans used attributes of other cultures in order to better themselves. They were opportunistic, in a

way, so that they could ensure their own economic survival, but always put a unique twist on those parts of foreign cultures that they assimilated into their public façade. As Udi Levy states, "Undoubtedly the Nabateans used elements of Greek culture and state craft, but ancient traditions continued at the same time. This was one of the special features about the Nabataeans; they linked tried and tested elements with new ones to create something of their own. It is not difficult to imagine that the external face of the kingdom was adapted to its environment…but that internally the ancient traditions played a dominant role."[1] This division between public and private culture is visible in architecture, religion, the Nabataean language, and even numismatics. Understanding these parts of the Nabataeans' world necessitates looking at more than the material culture, however. In order to be able to look at all the evidence a historical framework is necessary as well.

The events which constructed the Nabataean necessity for a public culture cannot be understood without a history of the people and the ways they dealt with the stronger empires that surrounded them. Beginning with the history of the movement into the area surrounding Petra, which served as the center for the kingdom, and moving through the archaeological, material, and religious adjustments that occurred during the kingdom's history, the character of the Nabataeans becomes more apparent. Through their ability to change just enough, they were not seen as a threat to the Greeks, who felt the Nabataeans were at least partially Hellenized, nor the Romans, because for a while they believed the Nabataeans were Romanized.[2] All the while, the Nabataeans retained their own culture

[1] Udi Levy, *The Lost Civilization of Petra* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1999), 53. While I do not agree with several of the conclusions made by Levy in his work, on this one point our ideas are in agreement.
[2] The classical definition of "Romanization" explains the process of giving a civilizing influence to a barbarian people and creating a type of "cultural homogenization." In this paper, I am showing that this

and practices, which were predominantly Near Eastern in origin, no matter that their contact with the West was substantial.

The earliest history of the Nabataeans is obscured by time and a lack of solid evidence, possibly due to the Nabataeans being a nomadic people originally. Biblical references place the Nabataeans farther south in Arabia than the area in which they are better known.[3] The area surrounding Petra, including the Sinai, southern Negev, Jordan, the Hauran, parts of the Wadi Sirhan, and the coast of the Red Sea to Hegra,[4] was originally settled by the Edomites. While the exact timeline is unknown, archaeological evidence shows that around 580 BCE the Nabataeans started to move into the kingdom of Edom and integrated into this settled group.[5] Diodorus Siculus, using the evidence provided by the now lost reporting of Hieronymus of Cardia, describes the Nabataeans as living "a life of brigandage, and overrunning a large part of the neighboring territory they pillage it…"[6] This lifestyle was predominant before they moved into the land of Edom, but Diodorus also states that the Nabataeans, or the "Arabs" he designates as such, had their own hidden wells in the desert.[7] This could point to a beginning of Nabataean settlement in the area even while they continued their traditional nomadic lifestyle.

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was just a superficial adaptation, not a core deep change. The definition was provided by Deirdre Barrett, *The Ceramic Oil Lamp as an Indicator of Cultural Change within Nabataean Society in Petra and its Environs Circa CE 106* (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2008), 2-4.

[3] This area "in which they are better known" is the land surrounding the capital of Petra.

[4] Warwick Ball, *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire* (London: Routledge, 2000), 62.

[5] Ian Browning, *Petra* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), 29.

[6] Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca,* trans. by Skelton, Salter, and Edwards (London: Boydell & Brewer Inc., 1963), II.48.2. While there are inherent problems using a source that is so clearly biased against certain groups of people, the rarity of evidence requires the usage of such sources, although with prejudice. The actual text reads, "έχουσι δέ βίον ληστρικόν, καί πολλην της ομόρου χώρας κατατρέχοντες ληστεύουσιν…"

[7] Diodorus, II.48.2-3. The text reads, "κατά γάρ τήν ανυδρον χώραν λεγομένην κατεσκευακότες εύκαιρα φρέατα, καί ταυτα πεποιηκότες τοις αλλοις έϑνεσιν άγνωστα συμφεύγουσιν εις τήν χώραν ταύτην ακινδύνως." This translates as "For in the waterless region, as it is called, they have dug wells at

This movement north into Edomite territory seems to have been the result of long-term population shifts, not one violent invasion. As is stated by Ian Browning, "At the end of the century [6th century BC] so many Nabataeans had arrived that…the recently (1968) found Late Edomite pottery excavated at Tawilan may be taken as something of an indication. Its character is so remarkably akin to Nabataean pottery that it seems quite possible that it is the forerunner of that extremely beautiful ware. If one accepts this to be so, it would mean that the new arrivals were taught this craft by the Edomites."[8] Over time, the Nabataean population moved into this previously settled area and took over. It seems that this was a fairly peaceful switch, involving the intermingling of the two, quite different populations. The pottery sherds found at Petra even show that the older culture taught its trade and art to the new arrivals. This may be the first example of the way in which the "quite remarkably adaptable"[9] Nabataeans assumed the traits of other cultures around them in order to facilitate their own needs, which later would be trade almost exclusively.

After the movement away from their nomadic lifestyle and settling on the site of Petra, the Nabataeans developed their own agriculture and trade connections. Petra[10] was ideally suitable as a trade city, as it was located on one of the only passable routes through the desert. And as one of the only places in which water could be found, as well as situated with natural passage between the Mediterranean and the lands east of the desert and routes to Gaza and Damascus,[11] Petra had a choice. Michael Rostovtzeff

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convenient intervals and have kept the knowledge of them hidden from the peoples of all other nations, and so they retreat in a body to this region out of danger."

[8] Browning, *Petra,* 32.

[9] Browning, *Petra,* 33.

[10] Petra was also known as Rekem in some primary sources, notably that of Josephus.

[11] Browning, *Petra,* 13-19.

states that such a place, such a city, could turn one of two ways. "Such a mass of cliffs not far from the main road of the caravans might be both a blessing and a curse to them [the merchants]. This depended on the inhabitants of the oasis, who, under the protection of their inaccessible cliffs, might organize themselves into a band of robbers and pillage the caravans or make them pay a high ransom for their safety; or they might choose another way—welcome the caravans, guarantee them rest, water, food, and safety in their journey farther to the north."[12] These were necessities to anyone attempting to cross the desert. The Nabataeans took this second option, in return for a fee. A 25% tax would be charged for goods passing through Petra and the Nabataeans would use these contacts to further their own influence.[13] By the time it became a Roman province, Nabataea had become adept at using trade and taxes to create their own power base and substantial monopoly on goods moving in and out of the region.

Beyond being the middle men and a stopping point for goods that ran through the capital city of Petra, the Nabataeans also conducted their own business from the natural products of their environment. Diodorus Siculus mentions early in his description of the Nabataeans that they derived "not a little revenue" from asphalt from the Dead Sea.[14] According to Diodorus, the Nabataeans even had a vocabulary for large and small quantities produced each year. "Bull," or "more than three plethora," and "calf," or "only two," denote how much asphalt is produced. This usage of technical terminology shows a shift in mentality away from a nomadic people to that of a merchant-based society, even though the terminology of "bull" and "calf" shows a continuing close link to their

[12] Michael Rostovtzeff, *Out of the Past of Greece and Rome* (New York: Yale University Press, 1960), 71.
[13] Anonymous, *Periplus Maris Erythraei,* translated by Lionel Casson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 19.
[14] Diodorus, II.48.3. The Greek text reads, "λίμνη τε μεγάλη φέρουσα πολλήν άσφαλτον, εξ ἧς λαμβάνουσιν οὐκ ὀλίγας προσόδους."

nomadic and pastoral past. Diodorus' usage of these terms makes it seem as if much of the population was familiar with them and possibly involved in the process of harvesting the asphalt. Also, the people capitalized on the fact that they were able to produce at least one substance that was found nowhere else. "And there is also found in these regions in a certain valley the balsam tree, as it is called, from which they receive a substantial revenue, since this tree is found nowhere else in the inhabited world and the use of it for medicinal purposes is most highly valued by physicians."[15] This shows as well how they were savvy traders and merchants. They took what the land naturally produced, found its value to others, and profited from that external need and market.

Even much later, before the first century CE, there is evidence of Nabataean trade with the Far East, mainly China. "…Chinese records refer to the place at which trade was transacted as Li-Kan, which it has been suggested could be a corruption of Rekem, the name by which Petra was originally known according to the historian Josephus and other writers. However, it could also have been Leuce Come on the coast just west of Dedan and which was the southernmost port of the Nabataean Kingdom."[16] In either case, the Nabataeans clearly had contacts which neither the Romans at the time, nor the Greeks before them, could rival. Not until the second century CE, the first Golden Era of the Silk Road, and the fall of Nabataea as an independent kingdom, was Rome able to trade at such distances. This supports the argument that the Nabataeans were middle men for goods and mediated movement between two parts of the world which had little contact or knowledge of one another. Exchange on this level would require facilitation

[15] Diodorus, II.48.9. Here the text reads, "γίνεται δέ περὶ τοὺς τόπους τούτους ἐν αύλωνί τινι καὶ τό καλούμενον βάλσαμον, εξ ου πρόσοδον αδράν λαμβάνουσιν, ουδαμου μέν της άλλης οίκουμένης ἐυρισκομένου του φυτου τούτου, της δ' ἐξ αυτου χρείας εις φαρμακα τοις ιατροις καϑ' υπερβολήν ἐϑετούσης."
[16] Browning, *Petra*, 19-20.

by a people who could charm and converse with both sides, while maintaining neutral in the face of external pressures.

This neutrality was essential to the economic prosperity of Nabataea as peace is necessary if trade is going to continue. While peace was preferred, it was not always possible, and the history of Nabataea is marked by conflict and wars. Very early in their history, however, they clearly established a policy to promote peace and trade, developed after an attack by their neighbors. Diodorus mentions an event in 312 BCE, one of the earliest mentions of the Nabataeans, in which Antigonus, a former general of Alexander the Great, sent troops led by Athenaeus to destroy the Nabataeans' home camp of Petra. These men assumed it would be an easy victory, as the soldiers were all away from the camp at some kind of fair, leaving only the old men, women, and children behind. But, when the Nabataean soldiers returned, they immediately set out after their attackers. "Learning there from the wounded what had happened they in all haste pursued the Greeks, and because the soldiers of Athenaeus were camping negligently, and, on account of their weariness were buried in sleep, some of the captives ran away unobserved, from whom the Nabataeans, learning the state of the enemy, attacked the camp about the third watch, not less than 8,000 in number, and most of them they slaughtered while still in their beds, but those who woke up and were flying to arms they shot down."[17] Even from an early time the Nabataeans were fierce fighters and were able to hold their own against foreign invaders.

Their ability to fight, however, would not serve them well if they wished to continue their role as middle men. Their power and influence was not derived from their

[17] Diodorus, quoted in Sir Alexander B. W. Kennedy, *Petra: Its History and Monuments* (London: Country Life, 1925), 31.

military, but from the trade connections they created and maintained by being one of the only passable places in the desert. Diplomacy had to become a key factor in how they dealt with surrounding powers and empires. In order to become the most effective diplomats possible, they utilized two methods. On the political front, the Nabataeans, with their capital at Petra, maintained their neutrality. During the Hellenistic period, "Petra, the former centre of the northern Arabian caravan trade, refused to be subjected either by the Seleucids or the Ptolemies. She retained her independent semi-friendly attitude towards both of them, benefiting at the same time by the weakness of both…"[18] Until Rome became too powerful in the area to ignore; the Nabataeans remained independent and put the continuation of trade above any political alliance.

The second method for maintaining their status as middle-men was cultural. The art, architecture, and religion of the Nabataeans deviated from the traditional culture on the surface. Beginning with the adoption of Edomite pottery, the Nabataeans appear to have taken parts of the cultures of those around them in order to blend in better with them. At their core, however, distinct Nabataean attributes remained. And while it is not possible to prove definitely the Nabataeans' intent, this idea of blending is reflected in the use of Hellenistic and Roman architectural types in the capital city of Petra alongside the strictly Nabataean forms. Also, Greek and Roman gods are portrayed on Nabataean buildings and altars, but god-blocks, a purely Near Eastern religious feature, continue throughout the history of the city. This suggests that the Nabataeans created a "public" culture that was able to adapt to ever-changing external pressures on its kingdom, but managed to maintain a "private" culture, or identity, that was true to their traditions.

[18] Michael Rostovtzeff, *Caravan Cities* (New York: AMS Press, 1932), 27.

There seems to be a theme to the Nabataean strategy before they became a Roman province in 106 CE. This theme is not to "rock the boat," or upset anyone who could be a possible trading partner. Trade was paramount and therefore had to be preserved. In order to accomplish this, the Nabataeans were a relatively inoffensive group of people for hundreds of years.[19] Not until they began to expand their physical territory and upset Rome's preferred balance of power in the Near East did they draw too much attention to themselves. It remains unclear if the Nabataean leaders became greedy, if they did not understand the political game as well as their predecessors, or if they simply wanted to challenge the power of Rome in the Near East. But at that point, no matter what action they had taken, it seems that no amount of public façade would have overcome Rome's desire to own that land and the wealth that Nabataea controlled.

Early in their recorded history, the Nabataeans did not have as much direct political contact with their neighbors as is seen during the Roman period. Alexander the Great's incorporation of Egypt and Near Eastern kingdoms into his empire did not include Nabataea, possibly due to the fact that at that time there was no distinct kingdom. Still mostly nomadic, the Nabataeans were just creating the trade connections that would define their society. Hellenism, however, did play an important role in Nabataea and was later adopted, as is seen in architecture and coins, which clearly would have made trade with all the regions affected by Alexander more accessible, although currently it is not possible to prove this was the only intent. The Hellenistic influence is also seen by

[19] There is one exception to this "inoffensiveness," which was their interactions with the Egyptians, who were direct trading competition. This is exemplified by the event in 31 BCE in which the Nabataeans burned Cleopatra's fleet at the request of the Syrian governor. It seems likely that the Nabataeans broke with their relative political neutrality not only to help Rome, but also to hurt their competitor and make themselves the best trade option available, since a strong Egyptian empire would hurt Nabataea's own economy. Jane Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans* (London: I.B. Taurus & Co Ltd,. 2001), 57.

looking at the archaeological remains, such as the architectural models dispersed within the capital city of Petra, the eventual adoption of Greek as a *lingua franca*, and also the depiction of Greco-Roman gods in wall paintings in several Nabataean cities and temples.

Later in their history, the Nabataeans were challenged again for their trade connections, this time by the Roman Empire. The Romans were much stronger than the descendants of Alexander, the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, and therefore eventually did overwhelm the Nabataeans, but the basic culture of this people did not fade entirely until nearly two hundred years after their annexation into the Roman Empire.[20] Unfortunately for the Nabataeans, Rome was able to finish what Alexander had started. Their desire for control of the land surrounding Petra was backed by resources that could support their imperial ambition. The Nabataean use of Roman coinage, military titles, pottery types and architecture eventually became a dependence on Rome, especially once the Roman military controlled Nabataean trade routes, and allowed Rome to overcome their independence.

Rome's interests in the Near East were contingent on control of an area that was historically hard to control. Bandits were not uncommon along any main "highways" and the people who lived there were nomadic and, therefore, hard to manage. As Bowersock stated:

> The importance of Roman Arabia for an imperial power in the Mediterranean cannot be overestimated. This often inhospitable region controls access to the Mediterranean, at ports such as Gaza and Rhinocolura (el 'Arish), from the interior of the peninsula as well as from

[20] This lasting culture can be seen in the Nabataean pottery styles, terracotta figurines and language that persisted even after the political structure was absorbed in 106 CE, as will be shown in the following chapters.

> the Gulf of ʻAqaba. It provides the southern flank for coastal Syria and Judea. It dominates the route from Damascus to ʻAqaba. Furthermore, it is essential for communications across the Jordan Valley between the urban centers in Judaea and those of Transjordan, which, in turn, furnish links with the nomadic culture beyond. The strategic importance of the area was as great as life in it was difficult. With the exception of certain urban centers in northern Transjordan that had easy access to the Jordan Valley and to the cities west of it, most of Roman Arabia presented a thoroughly unfamiliar aspect to the Romans.[21]

These are also the reasons for which Nabataea worked so hard to keep control of its territory. But the wealth that was so attractive to Rome could not be ignored and the more powerful Rome grew, the more the Nabataeans had to watch their political choices and also maintain a public façade of Romanization. In the end, however, this could not stave off Rome and only delayed the eventual fall of Nabataean independence.

Before this fall, the Nabataeans seemed to be a society that was able to do whatever was necessary and use it to their own advantage—whether it was the adoption of a foreign attribute or burying their core culture to create a metropolitan kingdom. Possibly the best example of a Nabataean who embodied such traits is the character of Syllaeus, a minister to Obodas II, who led the Romans on an abortive expedition into Southern Arabia in approximately 26 BCE, described further in Chapter 2. Syllaeus managed both to remain true to the needs of Nabataea, which depended on the incense trade from Southern Arabia, and to avoid infuriating the Romans, which would only cause harm to come to his people. This talent of promoting the external needs of the kingdom and supporting the internal necessities, at the same time, is one that seems to have been deliberately employed not only by Syllaeus, but by the Nabataean government in many areas. Understanding these tactics, through the story of Syllaeus, as well as the

[21] G. W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 2.

remaining material culture, allows for a greater understanding of the public and private as two parts of the culture as a whole.

Going beyond this story and examining each type of evidence independently makes obvious the political façade of the intentional adoption of certain aspects of other cultures. Architecture, numismatics, religion, pottery styles and terracotta figurines, hydraulic systems, language development and the *lingue franche* show how styles varied throughout Nabataean history according to the power of external kingdoms. But this variation and development has a unique property that sets it apart from the typical—between, and sometimes during, phases there is a shift back to the original style. This basic Nabataean "type" shows how the central attributes of the culture never truly changed. They simply blended into their environment by changing their skin, as would a chameleon, so to prosper more fully from the trade that was so central to their lives.

Chapter 2
Syllaeus and Aelius Gallus' Expedition to Arabia Felix

Rome knew that the trade so richly enjoyed by the Nabataeans was, in large part, derived from the lands in Southern Arabia, which were so plentiful in incense. In order to circumvent the 25% tax that the Nabataeans added to all goods that passed through their lands,[22] Rome decided to send an expedition into Arabia Felix, in 26 BCE, in order to make their own trade connections with the Sabaeans, who ruled that area. For reasons that do not make much sense, since the Nabataeans would be most negatively affected by Roman control of the trade routes, the Romans hired a Nabataean guide to lead them south. This guide was a prominent man in the Nabataean hierarchy named Syllaeus.[23] He and the Nabataean king must have known that, if the Romans succeeded in their mission, trade through Nabataea would have floundered or ceased completely. It is for this reason that the most sense can be made through the theory that Syllaeus, while generally crafty in his behavior, but with the possible support of the Nabataean king, intentionally led the Romans through the worst possible beach landings and desert paths

[22] Anonymous, *Periplus Maris Erythraei,* trans. by Lionel Casson, 19.2. The actual text reads, "Διό καί παραφυλακής χάριν καί εις αυτην παραλήπτης της τετάρτης τών εισψερομένων ψορτίων καί εκατοντάρχης μετά στρατεύματος αποστέλλεται," and translates into, "For that reason, as a safeguard there is dispatched for duty in it a customs officer to deal with the (duty of a) fourth on incoming merchandise as well as a centurion with a detachment of soldiers."

[23] Strabo, *Geography,* translated by Horace L. Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), 16.4.23-24. Syllaeus would later, while serving as minister to the Nabataean King Obodas III, become infamous for his cunning manner and a failed attempt to overthrow his own king by winning over the Roman Emperor and having himself named King. This attempt, while promising at first, ended in his beheading and led to him being reviled in the surviving ancient accounts.

in order to make sure that the expedition failed. This failure would allow for the Nabataeans to continue their near monopoly on trade in the region.

Between the years 26 and 25 BCE, Augustus decided to incorporate the peninsula of Arabia into his empire. In order to do so, however, he would need to send part of his army into an area that was completely unknown to them. Being on good terms with Nabataea, which had direct contact with the people of the southern section of the peninsula, Rome acquired a guide. This presented a problem for the Nabataeans and as historian Jane Taylor writes, "…succeed, and you lose much of your trade and the wealth it brings; fail, and you lose the friendship of the most powerful man in the world."[24] The Nabataeans must have known that in order to circumvent these two outcomes, they would need someone crafty and intelligent to lead the Romans to a failed expedition, but without raising their suspicions. Syllaeus was the man for the job. As reported by Strabo,

> Syllaeus was however treacherous throughout; for he neither guided them by a safe course by sea along the coast, nor by a safe road for the army, as he promised, but exposed both the fleet and the army to danger, by directing them where there was no road, or the road was impracticable, where they were obliged to make long circuits, or to pass through tracts of country destitute of everything; he led the fleet along a rocky coast without harbours, or to places abounding with rocks concealed under water, or with shallows. In places of this description particularly, the flowing and ebbing of the tide did them the most harm.[25]

This resulted in the suffering of the Romans, who had to spend a great amount of time nursing soldiers back to health. After moving into the innermost parts of Arabia, they ran

[24] Jane Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans* (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd., 2002), 60.
[25] Strabo, *Geography*, 16.4.23. The original text reads, "Συλλαῖος, ὑποσχόμενος μὲν ἡγήσεσθαιτὴν ὁδὸν καὶ χορηγήσειν ἅπαντα καὶ συμπράξειν, ἅπαντα δ᾽ ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆςπράξας, καὶ οὔτε παράπλουν ἀσφαλῆ μηνύων οὔθ᾽ ὁδόν, ἀλλὰ ἀνοδίαις καὶκυκλοπορίαις καὶ πάντων ἀπόροις χωρίοις ἢ ῥαχίαις ἁλιμένοις παραβάλλωνἢ χοιράδων ὑφάλων μεσταῖς ἢ τεναγώδεσι: πλεῖστον δὲ αἱ πλημμυρίδεςἐλύπουν ἐν τοιούτοις καὶ ταῦτα χωρίοις καὶ αἱ ἀμπώτεις."

short on water, although they did successfully take a few Arab cities. But, eventually, they found themselves faced with an enemy that they could not defeat.

Aelius Gallus, the leader of the Romans, "proceeded to a city Marsiaba, belonging to the nation of the Rhammanitæ, who were subjects of Ilasarus. He assaulted and besieged it for six days, but raised the siege in consequence of a scarcity of water."[26] All the locals had to do was wait within their walls until the soldiers outside died of thirst. Two days away from Arabia Felix, Aelius Gallus had had enough and decided to take his army home. The trip back north took only 60 days, a swift time compared to the six months it took to reach Gallus' southernmost point.[27] With very little gained, the expedition returned home—with the Nabataeans still firmly in control of their trade network.

After Syllaeus led the Romans back to the Mediterranean, nothing happened. The Nabataeans were not punished for having a hand in the failure of the expedition. Augustus did not even view the expedition as a failure in fact, "…throughout his life the emperor appears to have regarded the expedition a success—his army had penetrated deep into the Arabian peninsula, with all its supposed wealth from aromatics, they had defeated Arab armies and captured Arab cities."[28] With amazing skill, the Nabataeans, and especially Syllaeus, had routed Roman intentions without bringing the wrath of the emperor and the empire down on their own heads. This escape from punishment may have also been due in part to Rome's attention on other matters at that time. When Aelius Gallus was leading his expedition, Rome was also in the process of annexing

[26] Strabo, *Geography*, 16.4.24. The original text reads, "σίτου καὶ φοινίκων εἰς πόλιν Μαρίαβα προῆλθεν ἔθνουςτοῦ Ῥαμμανιτῶν, οἳ ἦσαν ὑπὸ Ἰλασάρῳ. ἓξ μὲν οὖν ἡμέρας προσβαλὼνἐπολιόρκει, λειψυδρίας δ᾽ οὔσης ἀπέστη…"
[27] Strabo, *Geography*, 16.4.24.
[28] Taylor, *The Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*, 62.

Galatia, conquering the Cantabri, Astures, and Callaeci of Spain, as well as pacifying the Alpine districts and reorganizing Gaul and Germany in order to incorporate them more effectively into the Empire.[29] The relaxed response to the failed expedition may have simply been because Rome had more to worry about than a faraway inhospitable territory. In either case, minister Syllaeus enjoyed a high position in both political and social spheres for many years, at least partially due to his cunning during this event.[30]

It may be easier to see Syllaeus as an inept guide or even Strabo's whipping boy, but this would not be showing the true character of the man or of the event. As Bowersock writes, "But Gallus' expedition turned out to be a terrible disaster; and Strabo, unwilling to pin the blame upon his friend and patron, found in the Nabataean minister of Obodas, Syllaeus, a suitable scapegoat…Strabo blames him not only for choosing a route which debilitated the Roman army but even for bringing troops across from Egypt to the coastal port of Leuke Kome in the Hejaz."[31] One of the problems in this interpretation of Strabo's accounting is that Syllaeus, as a Nabataean born and raised, would have known that there were ways to reach southern Arabia without destroying the health and fitness of most of Gallus' soldiers. Trade routes had been used for hundreds of years, both over the desert and through the port at Leuke Kome, as well as others. While they may not have been perfectly suited for a great number of soldiers, they at least would not have forced landings on beaches that were rocky and hazardous.

[29] Michael Grant, *History of Rome* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978), 518 and Arthur Boak and William Sinnigen, *A History of Rome to A.D. 565* (London: Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1921), 287-288.
[30] Syllaeus' story does end with a somewhat negative note, however. Years later, he was beheaded in Rome, once the emperor figured out that Syllaeus had been lying to him in order to be appointed the head of the Nabataean kingdom and had gone so far as possibly trying to assassinate the current king.
[31] Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 47.

Bowersock also goes on to say that no route could have been found that would have been "familiar or tolerable to Roman soldiers."[32] This may have also been true, as the climate of southern Arabia is radically different from anything they would have encountered before. But, a good guide, with good intentions, would have been able to advise the leaders of the expedition and possibly even the soldiers themselves of what alterations should have been made to their attire, armor, and general supplies to better prepare themselves for the intense heat and cold of a desert crossing. It would seem that none of these things happened. If this is true, then it lends credence to the idea, Strabo's idea, that Syllaeus did not want the Romans to succeed, which would not have been good for the Nabataean economy.

If Nabataea did nothing while Rome went to Arabia Felix, they could have lost their trading partners and therefore their monopoly. They could have also incurred the wrath of the much more powerful Rome. If Nabataea had tried to stop the Romans from completing their expedition, they would have incurred that wrath for sure. In a situation where they had few options, the Nabataeans did that at which they excelled. They played the political game and manipulated the situation in order to come out the winners. By sending the minister to the king along on the journey, Syllaeus was in a position to give face value to the cooperation of the Nabataean kingdom, but was also in the perfect position to put as many roadblocks in the way of the Romans as possible. He managed to do so in such a way that the Nabataeans retained control of their monopoly and their sphere of influence, but also did not anger the Romans. He was able to maneuver all the

[32] Ibid.

players so that Nabataean interests came out on top.[33] This cunning of the Nabataeans is exemplified in the story of Syllaeus, but is further demonstrated in the following chapters through the examination of the surviving material culture.

[33] It should be noted that Syllaeus may have also been working in his own interests as well. As was stated above, Syllaeus's reputation increased among the Nabataeans and when he returned he was rewarded for his service.

Chapter 3
Culture from Archaeology

The determination of culture from surviving artifacts is fraught with difficulties. It also traverses the boundaries of archaeology, anthropology, art, and literary history. In the case of the Nabataeans, much of the material culture is still lost, but modern researchers are fortunate that through past and current excavations much more is becoming available. What has been found, however, is not enough to answer all the questions which remain, most especially those pertaining to the intentions and motivations of those in power. If these questions are to be answered, the Petra excavations need to focus directly on understanding the political motivations of the kingdom. Since documentation may have succumbed to the harsh conditions through history, archaeology is necessary to uncover structures devoted to the running of the Nabataean kingdom. While the recordings of Josephus, Strabo, and even the Babatha Archive, to some extent, give their own interpretations of kings' actions, no internal records of the Nabataean kingdom endure to answer those questions decisively. Therefore, it is the job of the modern historian to analyze what does persist in order to put forth a theory that answers them, but in order to do that, with more confidence, more information is needed.

These answers are derived from the combination of the different types of archaeological material that still exist and fit together to create a more cohesive picture of

the cultural history of independent Nabataea. By only looking at certain aspects of material culture, the overall perspective can be lost. Analyzing many types of evidence together creates a more comprehensive picture of a culture, which is that of the Nabataeans in this case. As Ian Morris states, "…saying that archaeology is cultural history is rather a quiet revolution, because cultural history is already to a considerable extent anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, and a whole string of other things."[34] The following sections, which draw from this idea of interdisciplinary overlap, show how the remaining pieces of the water systems, architecture, religion, pottery, language, coins, and written history are able to work together to reveal something of the intent of the leaders and the people of the Nabataean kingdom.

In order to show the unique way in which the Nabataeans created an external identity for themselves, separate from their independent and private culture, serving to protect their trade, the barricade between archaeology and history must be breached. Ian Morris also said, "It seems to me that a kind of institutional inertia—the dull compulsion of situated, routinized patters of communication—has made it difficult for archaeologists and historians to talk to each other."[35] An awareness of this disconnect has allowed this author to attempt to overcome it by using both the literary sources and the material remains to reconstruct a type of overview of the culture as a whole. By looking at such a wide variety of artifacts, a trend in Nabataean history and political intent recurs. This trend is the determination to do whatever is necessary to promote trade, but without compromising a core of Nabataean identity, which will be further detailed in the following chapters.

[34] Ian Morris, *Archaeology as Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000), 4.
[35] Ian Morris, *Archaeology as Cultural History*, 18.

Building on the ideas of Walter Taylor in *The Study of Archaeology* in 1948, Lewis Binford stated, "…artifacts having their primary functional context in different operational sub-systems of the total cultural system will exhibit differences and similarities differentially, in terms of the structure of the cultural system of which they were a part."[36] Using this idea, this author has looked across the material culture from the former Nabataean kingdom in an attempt to find the ways in which similarities and differences reveal the "structure of the cultural system." A more complete understanding of the structure of this society may render a further understanding of the reasons behind the interactions of Nabataea and its neighbors, primarily Rome.

In order to do this, however, first the internal motivation of the Nabataean culture must be unambiguous. Through the extensive researching of various forms of the material culture from Nabataea, this author is using the local and international influences to deconstruct the remaining evidence of the culture. By understanding what was adopted from the external pressure exerted upon Nabataea, the parts of the culture that are purely Nabataean are clearer. The private culture holds tight to the nomadic past of the Nabataeans and lasts long after the annexation by Rome. This part of the culture shows how Nabataea differentiated itself from other kingdoms at the time and possibly why it was able to become so strong and hold onto its independence until 106 CE, when every other independent kingdom had succumbed to Rome long before. Such an analysis is dependent on looking beyond one type of evidence and truly reconstructing culture out of archaeology.

[36] Lewis Binford, *An Archaeological Perspective*, quoted in Ian Morris, *Archaeology as Cultural History*, 21.

Chapter 4
Hydraulic Systems

The Nabataean capital of Petra is best known for its grand rock-cut façades and the poet John William Burgon's image of the "rose red city." What most do not know is that, long before any of those famous structures were created, the Nabataeans excelled at managing the scarce water in their vast desert home. Even the historian Diodorus Siculus commented on the Nabataean cisterns: "…they have prepared subterranean reservoirs lined with stucco….they make great excavations in it, the mouths of which they make very small, but by constantly increasing the width as they dig deeper, they finally make them of such size that each side has a length of one plethrum."[37] This genius, which was derived from a desert application, then applied itself to the city, resulting in a vast network of pipes and even a dam to protect the citizens from the winter's flash flooding. These ingenious solutions to a persistent problem shows how well the Nabataeans adapted to situations and also possibly shows their ability, from a very early period, to take pieces of material culture from their neighbors in order to better their own situation. This ability then shifted from the earliest and purely practical way to protect themselves to a more economic based use to further their trade and wealth.

[37] Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca*, XIX.94.6-8. The actual text reads, "…τούτοις δὲ κατεσκευακόσιν ἀγγεῖακατὰ γῆς ὀρυκτὰ κεκονιαμένα μόνοις…ὧν τὰ μὲν στόμια μικρὰ παντελῶς κατασκευάζουσι, κατὰ βάθους δ᾽ ἀεὶ μᾶλλον εὐρυχωρῆ ποιοῦντες τὸ τελευταῖον τηλικοῦτ᾽ ἀποτελοῦσι τὸ μέγεθος ὥστε γίνεσθαι πλευρὰν ἑκάστην πλέθρου."

Nomadic peoples rarely develop complex water systems, relying more on nature to provide for them, such as with oases. Clearly the Nabataeans stand apart from this tradition because of their deliberate creation of underground reservoirs. While the exact reason for the shift to a settled population is unknown, it was clearly a deliberate step, as the work that went into these waterworks shows. Two theories exist on how these waterworks, namely the perfectly square cisterns described by Diodorus, came to be.

> The easiest way to explain this astounding phenomenon is to ascribe it to a process of development for which the Nabataeans were responsible. This would mean that the perfect reservoirs of the late Persian period mentioned by Diodorus-Hieronymus were developed by the Nabataeans during the times of the Babylonians or even the Assyrians, to whose times the origin of the Nabataeans is ascribed by Diodorus-Hieronymus. Another possibility is to consider the Nabataeans to have been good disciples of the people of southern Arabia, who made sophisticated waterworks during the Iron Age. But even if this latter were the case, it would have needed people sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to absorb the necessary knowledge, which would again put the Nabataeans on a level much higher than that of the other Northern Arabian tribes.[38]

These are the two theories, and while the first, in which the Nabataeans developed this system concurrently, but independently, of their neighbors, may be "the easier," if the second were to be true, and there is currently not enough evidence to prove one conclusively either way, then this shows a long history of Nabataean adoption of technology from neighbors to their own benefit. This could easily be translated into the adoption of skin-deep cultural characteristics to promote peace and trade among those same neighbors.

Water was supplied from three different sources at Petra. There were three springs near the city proper that could be funneled into a main depository. Springs within the city were also managed so as to provide the most water for everyone. Lastly, rain

[38] Avraham Negev, *Nabataean Archeology Today* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 5-6.

water, which measures to less than 150 mm a year, was also collected, through small channels cut directly into the cliff face, as it streamed down the stone walls.[39] It is very possible that this type of channel, cut directly into the natural walls, was derived from the curved barrage wall of the Sabaeans. The Sabaeans, trade partners of the Nabataeans mainly in frankincense and myrrh, also built a dam in order to provide irrigation for their fields. "At carefully regulated intervals throughout each day, this complex system of hydraulic arteries watered a vast area—around 72 square km—of fertile agricultural land…It was just this combination of skills [agriculture and trade], applied to similarly arid terrain, that the Nabataeans were to put to good use a few centuries later."[40] It seems possible that the Nabataeans borrowed from their trading partners that set of skills that would allow them to create a civilization in the middle of the desert, surrounded by nothing but sand and rock.

The ability to build a dam, also borrowed from the curved barrage wall of the Sabaeans, provided security to the Nabataeans, when adapted to their own purposes. Doubling as a defensive mechanism, the barrage dam at the mouth of the Siq protected the people from flooding and attacks, to some extent. "To construct the barrage dam, a concomitant escape route for flood waters would have had to be constructed. Hence the construction of the rock-cut tunnel just north of the Siq mouth through which the flood waters could be diverted around El-Kubtha has to be related to the whole defense-work

[39] Laila Nehme, "The Petra Survey Project," in *Petra Rediscovered: The Lost City of the Nabataeans*, edited by Markoe (Cincinnati: Harry Abrams with the Cincinnati Art Museum, 2003), 162-163.
[40] Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*, 22. The centuries between the Sabaean and the Nabataean usage of this technology may be attributed to the settled nature of the Sabaean society long before the Nabataeans took the same step. The contact of the two cultures, however, would not be affected by the nomadic style of the early Nabataeans. This would allow the Nabataeans to come into contact with the Sabaean waterworks, even if they did not put them into use until much later.

system."[41] This system strengthened Petra and therefore strengthened the Nabataeans. Without control of the elements surrounding them, the city of Petra would never have been able to reach the heights of prosperity that it knew. Also, the control of the water sources, whether it illustrates a long history of borrowing from other cultures or not, allowed for the creation of waterfalls, gardens, and even the pool complex within the city proper, not to mention the eventual shift to agriculture at the end of the Nabataean independence.

What is today known at the Petra Pool-Complex was originally designated as the "Lower Market." After the survey of 1998 and subsequent excavations this area was further uncovered and the more proper name of Pool-Complex "was applied."[42] The pool was originally constructed during the Nabataean period,[43] and as it was a public space and seems to have been used in public ritual, it demonstrates that it was something the Nabataean government decided to add to their city for a specific purpose. Unlike smaller material artifacts, monumental buildings, such as pool-complexes in the middle of the city, denote premeditated and purposeful messages and adaptations of foreign architecture, Hellenistic in this case, although it functioned in a similar capacity into the Roman era as well. As Bedal states, "The Petra Pool-Complex played an important role in the socio-political life of Petra during the Nabataean and Roman periods. The mere presence of a *paradeisos* in Petra symbolized the Nabataean king's power and helped to legitimize his place among contemporary rulers who utilized architectural programs,

[41] Philip C. Hammond, *The Nabataeans—Their History, Culture and Archeology* (Sweden: Astrom, 1973), 43-44.
[42] Leigh-Ann Bedal, *The Petra Pool-Complex: A Hellenistic* Paradeisos *in the Nabataean Capital* (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2003), IX.
[43] Ibid., 85. Phase 1 of the pool-complex's architecture has been dated to the end of the 1st century BCE.

gardens, and water display as political metaphor."[44] The very fact that the Nabataeans were able to create such a display in the middle of the desert made them a power in the ancient world. They may have still been considered "others" by the Greeks, but they made themselves a notable strength in the Near East.

The Nabataean kingdom adopted this idea of "water display" in order to try to "establish its position within the Hellenistic and Roman worlds."[45] But water display within the city itself has been little studied, at least in its more recreational forms. Religious and social uses for water are just being studied, with the help of Leigh-Ann Bedal and her excavations of the former "Lower Market" area. Sacred pools and fountains have also been uncovered which show that Nabataean deities were linked with water. In particular, Al-'Uzza was connected with water, which made it much easier to associate her also with Greek Aphrodite and Syrian Atargatis.[46] This association is one piece of evidence that helps to show the syncretism at which the Nabataeans excelled. This syncretism extended even farther than the city limits to the sacred place of Khirbet et-Tannur.[47] The Nabataean use of water made their culture more accessible to their trading partners, but without losing their original culture, as there is a long tradition of gardens and water display in the Near East, as far back as the Assyrians.[48] They simply joined some of their original views with those of their neighbors.

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[44] Bedal, *The Petra Pool-Complex…*, IX.
[45] Ibid., 86.
[46] Joseph Patrich, *The Formation of Nabataean Art: Prohibition of a Graven Image Among the Nabataeans* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1990), 83-85, and Bedal, *The Petra Pool-Complex*, 99.
[47] Bedal, *The Petra Pool-Complex*, 100, and Nelson Glueck, *Deities and Dophins: The Story of the Nabataeans* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), 315-319. As stated in Bedal, and explained in much further detail in Glueck, "In the Nabataean temple at Khirbet et-Tannur, anthropomorphic representations of Atargatis show her against a backdrop of abundant flowers and fruits and wearing a headdress of dolphins or fish…"
[48] For detailed information on the history of gardens in the Near East see Chapter V of Leigh-Ann Bedal's *The Petra Pool-Complex: A Hellenistic* Paradeisos *in the Nabataean Capital*.

Beyond the more decorative uses of water in Petra is the way in which it supported the kingdom, especially by the end of its independence. While this does not truly show the Nabataean ability to adapt in order to promote trade, the shift to agriculture shows how the kingdom continued after trade moved away from the overland routes under their control and took to the sea. True development of Nabataean agriculture began during the rule of Aretas IV and intensified through the last decades of the 1st century BCE.[49] Water management was necessary for the continuation of the Nabataean people in a way that had not been necessary before, at least not to the same extent. Without the monopolistic control of the trade routes it was difficult for the Nabataeans to procure the goods they needed to survive, especially since few goods were able to be grown in their desert home.[50] The Nabataeans may not have been able to sustain their trade monopoly and wealth any longer, but they once again showed their ability to adapt to situations in order to make the best for themselves. The waterworks of Petra may be the earliest examples of the Nabataean talent for adopting foreign attributes, but it is not one of the best known or most visible. Unlike the monumental architecture, described in the next chapter, it becomes lost against the more colorful and grandiose displays of public culture from the Nabataean kingdom.

[49] Bowersock, *Roman Arabia,* 64, and Negev, *Nabataean Archeology Today*, 45-46.

[50] Some of this is described in the ancient sources, such as when Strabo explains that much of their wine is made from palm and that they grow no olives and use in its place sesame oil (Strabo, *Geography*, XVI.4.21-25). Some exceptions must be made since he is telling this story secondhand, but it would seem reasonable that the desert does not grow an abundant amount of food.

Chapter 5
Architecture

Petra, the aforementioned "rose-red" city, this most famous of all Nabataean cities, is widely known for its architecture. Its facades carved in stone have awed visitors since its earliest days. The Nabataean culture and the value they placed on trade are reflected in these monuments. By examining the architectural motifs and styles in the Khasneh, the Qasr al-Bint, the Petra Great Temple, and the tomb of Sextius Florentinus,[51] the influences on the Nabataean kingdom, epitomized in their capital city, reveal themselves.[52] The history of carving in Nabataea and the dissection of several buildings, in which Hellenistic, Roman and Eastern influences make an appearance, highlight the core individuality of the Nabataean culture and a unique aspect of Nabataean archaeology.

Nabataeans were, as stated above, nomadic when first recorded in the historical account. This slowly changed, however, as they began to settle and create their own

[51] Sextius Florentinus appears as Sextus Florentinus in Ian Browning's *Petra,* 224-225.

[52] A problem is inherent in the dating of the monuments, however. Any structure without an inscription is up for debate about when it truly was constructed. For example, the Khasneh, arguably one of the most famous monuments in Petra, has been attributed to the time of Hadrian, Augustus, Aretas III, Aretas IV, before 9 BC, towards the end of the first century BCE, and after 106 CE, just to name a few. Conclusive proof is still lacking to end the debate. In this study, absolute dates, although a Late Hellenistic period seems most likely to the author, seem unnecessary in order to evaluate influences upon the buildings themselves. This list of dates was provided by information in Judith McKenzie, *The Architecture of Petra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6-7.

monuments in the first century BCE.[53] The monuments in Petra, the focus of this chapter, show how architectural features were adapted from the various cultures that the Nabataeans came into contact with during their reign as a trading power. "This architecture was an eclectic blend of ideas borrowed with uncomplicated self-confidence from the cultures with which they had come into contact. Assyrian, Egyptian, Hellenistic and Roman influences, far from being either shunned as un-Nabataean or merely imitated as if they were superior, were transformed by the originality of their genius into something uniquely Nabataean."[54] By focusing specifically on four monuments, the Hellenistic, Roman, Near Eastern and pure Nabataean facets are open to analysis and show the deliberate use of foreign elements in local architecture to provide a multinational and cosmopolitan surface. Also possible is to theorize the intent of the government behind the inclusion of certain elements in these buildings since they were clearly public spaces. The more powerful the foreign nation, the more likely the Nabataeans were to include them. While it cannot be stated definitively that the Nabataeans only incorporated foreign architecture in order to promote politico-economic stability, this theory does account for the continuing presence of the Nabataean traditional designs that are present even after its loss of independence.

One of the earliest influences on Nabataean architecture comes from the Hellenistic kingdoms to the west. This influence is not hard to understand since the Nabataeans controlled the frankincense and myrrh trade, aromatics which were dear to the religious practices of the Greeks. This trade connection handled more than simple

[53] Martha Sharp Joukowsky, "The Petra Great Temple: A Nabataean Architectural Miracle," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 65 (2002), 242 and Ya'akov Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1975), 2-3. This date is supported by archaeological evidence, such as pottery sherds, found at the site.

[54] Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*, 82.

goods, but also exchanged ideas and styles—some of which manifested in the monuments at Petra.[55] According to Ian Browning, "Hellenism was eventually to swamp the local tradition and to lead to a period of almost architectural chaos…for imitations became inevitable, or worse, attempts would be made to try to relate the local classicism with its obsession for horizontal lines, to the classicism of the West."[56] Even if one disagrees that Hellenism swamped local style, it is very evident that it was adopted into local usage to a great extent. The pure Nabataean features that intertwine themselves with the Hellenistic features show the continuation of a unique cultural identity.

As Rome began to increase its position and influence in the Near East, it also spread its architectural styles into those kingdoms.

> The archaeological evidence clearly shows that the architecture [in] the Eastern provinces was not in any way second-rate, despite the fact that Roman concrete could not generally be made. Provincial architecture was not merely a pale imitation of metropolitan forms, and developments did not slavishly follow those of Rome. After the initial impetus there was an independent line of development which took positive advantage of local materials…[57]

This was typified in the work of the Nabataeans. While they did adopt Roman aspects of architecture, the details took on a whole different feel and were adapted to show the independent nature of Nabataea. One example of this mutation of the Roman style is the Petra theater. While it obeys accurately the Vitruvian specifications for "shape, proportion, orientation, and stage design," the Nabataeans put their own twist on it by carving it out of rock instead of building it with brick and concrete as would the

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[55] Beyond the architectural aspects, the Nabataeans at least partially adopted the Hellenistic Hippodamian grid system in order to build their city, showing the use of helpful parts of the foreign culture piecemeal, but not the adoption of the whole system. Information is from Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*, 113.

[56] Browning, *Petra*, 8.

[57] Hazel Dodge, "The Architectural Impact of Rome in the East," in *Architecture and Architectural Sculpture in the Roman Empire*, edited by Martin Henig (Boston: Brill, 2000), 118.

Romans.[58] This change in the expected architectural model shows the thread of individuality that marks nearly every encounter of the Nabataeans and foreigners.

One further influence of the Romans upon the Nabataeans was in the creation and building of superior free-standing structures. The Nabataeans, a tent-dwelling, nomadic people for most of their history, had no real need for free standing buildings, especially houses, and, therefore, did not excel at their construction. Although construction began in the third century BCE and was somewhat refined in the first century BCE, it was not until the first century CE that serious technological developments were made,[59] most likely by Roman influence. Around approximately 25 CE, houses became "carefully worked and [had] evenly coursed masonry," although the interior still lacked the refinement of Roman dwellings.[60] Although Parr classifies these houses as under Hellenistic influence, it seems more likely that only the first two stages of development were so, while the third stage, taking place in the first century CE, was Roman, to some degree. This is based on the time period, during which Hellenism had started to dissipate from the Near East, while the presence of Rome increased in the Near East and specifically in Nabataea, not on a distinct difference in "Greek" and "Roman" styles.

But for as strong as an influence as Rome came to be in Nabataea, culminating in the annexation of the kingdom in 106 CE, Eastern or Oriental influences may have been even stronger. "There are obvious Graeco-Roman derivatives in the architecture…These resemblances, however, are superficial…The large temple enclosure has an immensely

[58] Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*, 112.
[59] P. J. Parr, "The Beginnings of Hellenization at Petra," (presented at *8^e Congres international d'Archeologie classique*, Paris, France, 1965), 528-529.
[60] Ibid.

long history in ancient Near Eastern architecture…"[61] While this quotation may have been speaking directly about the temple style, the fact remains that Nabataean architecture drew on more than just its powerful neighbors to the West. The Iranian power to the East had nearly as much influence, as did the kingdom's local predecessors.

Figure 5.1 Petraean Elephant Capital

This elephant head capital was found in the Petra Great Temple and possibly shows the powerful influence of Eastern styles on Nabataean decorative motifs.

Examples of Eastern architecture are found within Petra, as well as in other, smaller Nabataean cities. The very existence of Nabataean rock-cut tomb facades, for instance, shows the Eastern influences which prevailed upon Nabataea. "Rock-cut tomb façades had a long history in the East before the Romans…both the Pontic and the Persian royal tombs are probably related ultimately to the Lycian style, one of the strongest and most pervasive forms of funerary architecture in the East."[62] Beyond this one general example, a specific decorative aspect featured in figure 5.1, found in Petra, shows a distinct and unusual influence.

> They [the Indian elephants] are known in Indian art from about the same time, and India was also the origin of many Nabataean trading goods, in particular spices. The Nabataeans could have found the motif in Hellenistic sources, but it is also possible that India can be added to the list of countries from which they adopted design ideas, and adapted them to

[61] Ball, *Rome in the East*, 332.
[62] Ball, *Rome in the East*, 370.

> their own version. Where the Nabataeans appear to have been original is to have elephant heads as volutes on column capitals.[63]

The trade which sustained the Nabataean kingdom depended on the ability to move goods from the East through to the Mediterranean world and back. Therefore, it does not seem unlikely that the inspiration for these capitals was directly gained from India itself. The 156 total elephant heads on the Great Temple show their inherent importance to the kingdom no matter their direct origin.[64] In either case, whether its influence derived from the East or through Westernized forms of an originally Eastern concept, the detail in these carvings promotes the artistry of the Nabataeans and their ability to adapt foreign symbols to work for their own purposes.

One architectural feature that does not have a direct counterpart in the Roman sphere is the *kalybe*, a public monument similar to the Greco-Roman *nymphaeum*. First

Figure 5.2 This Syrian *kalybe,* while not the exact Nabataean ruin, may be one of the best surviving examples of this architectural feature, also known from the ruins in Bosra.

[63] Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*, 109-110.
[64] Martha Sharp Joukowsky, "The Petra Great Temple: A Nabataean Architectural Miracle," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 65 (2002), 246. Figure 5.1 The Petraean Elephant Capital is also from this article, page 245, picture taken by A. W. Joukowsky, at the Brown University excavation site at Petra.

identified at Bosra, the later capital of Nabataea, the *kalybe* may not be found in Rome but could have served a similar function to other Greco-Roman structures, even though it lacked a fountain which is very common in the Greco-Roman designs.[65] "Instead, the aedicular *kalybe* may have served much the same purpose that nymphaea and gates did elsewhere in the Roman East, to provide a grandiose theatrical backdrop to a public square."[66] Once again showing the pronounced Nabataean connection to the East, the *kalybe* is also found in other parts of Syria, the Hauran, and Trachon region of Asia Minor.[67] The function of the *kalybe* may not have differed greatly from the Greco-Roman use of the *nymphaeum*, but what shows the cultural difference is the very fact that, while the Nabataeans could have chosen to use the *nymphaeum*, instead they created a more typical Eastern style structure. The use of Eastern architectural features in buildings related to public life must have been deliberate, as decisions for them must have been made by someone high enough in the Nabataean hierarchy to understand the political and economic repercussions of such a choice.

Only by looking at specific examples can the influences of Hellenism, Romanism, and the Oriental East be fully appreciated. By separating several buildings into their various architectural features, the influences acting upon each one may be more easily understood. Even with the breakdown, however, influences can be muddied, especially since no written records exist to explain the intentions behind each choice. Therefore, it

[65] Ball, *Rome in the East*, 292.
[66] Barbara Burrell, "False Fronts: Separating the Aedicular Façade from the Imperial Cult in Roman Asia Minor," *American Journal of Archaeology* 110 (2006): 459.
[67] Ibid.

is the job of the archaeologist and historian to try to place structures into a context that provides the most probable explanation for the development of the Nabataeans and Petra.

The most iconic monument of Petra, the Khasneh,[68] figure 5.3, is also one of the most difficult to date. Fortunately, the influences which helped to create it are not as obscure. For all the confusion about dates, the purpose of the monument is also now clear. As Andrew Stewart so eloquently states, "Yet the Khazneh is neither a treasury nor (as some still maintain) a temple. It is a tomb. It looks like a tomb; is laid out like a tomb; is embellished like a tomb; is furnished with arrangements for tomb-cult; two Nabataean tomb-obelisks rise from its upper pavilions; a typically Nabataean funerary triclinium is to be found opposite it, across the Siq; and all its friends and neighbors are tombs."[69] The rock façade of this tomb clearly expresses the Hellenistic motifs adopted and put to good use on the most recognizable of the Petraean monuments.

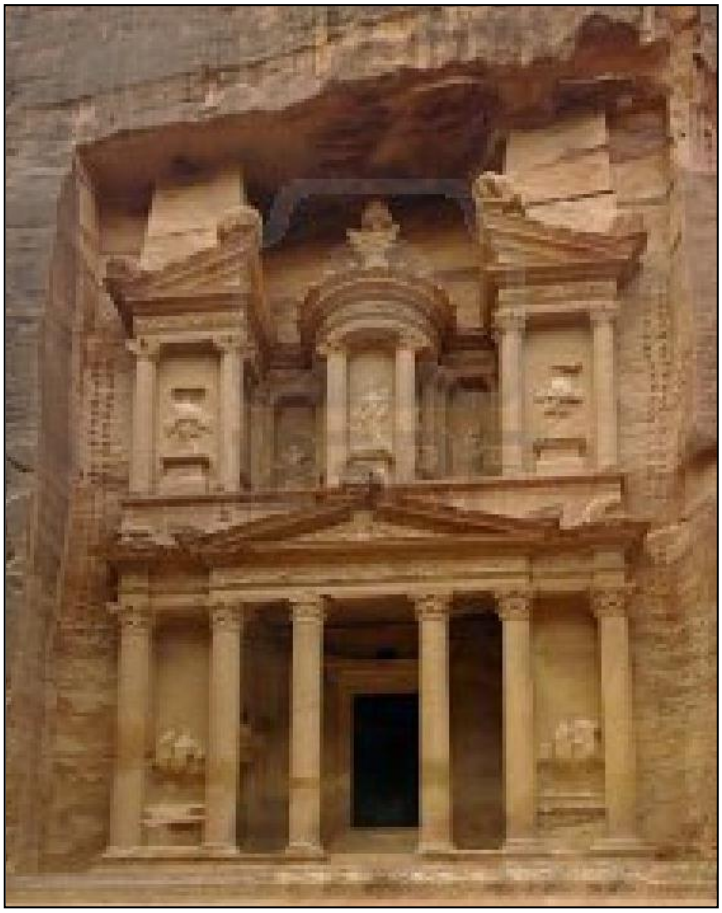

Figure 5.3 The Khasneh of Petra

[68] "Khasneh" is spelled with many different variations, not the least of which are Khazneh and Khasneh, both of which appear in this work and are shortened forms of El Khazneh al Faroun or the Pharaoh's Treasury. The different forms are used in order to preserve the preference of the author quoted, while the author of this work prefers the spelling "Khasneh."

[69] Andrew Stewart, "The Khazneh," in *Petra Rediscovered*, edited by Markoe, 193.

An impression of Classical Greek styles is striking just by viewing the details of the monument. By breaking down individual architectural sections, however, this first impression is reinforced.[70] The columns, which decorate both the upper and lower stories, are clearly Corinthian and of Greek design or at least of Greek origin.[71] They are highly decorated by animals, flowers, and many vegetables, which are not necessarily Greek in origin, but promote feelings of prosperity which would be appropriate in a tomb that must have been built by a very wealthy member of the Nabataeans. One design that cannot be accounted for by local tradition is the carving of two Greek mythological creatures on the lower pediments. "The lower story consists of a four-columned, pedimented portico flanked by shallow recesses and two side columns. In each recess, a pedestal supports a life-size, high-relief sculpture of a cloaked, bare-chested man and his horse. These are surely the Dioscuri—the divine twins, Castor and Pollux."[72] These two men are a clear indication that Hellenism had a strong influence on the architecture of Petra, but it does not seem to have had a deeper impact on the culture. Adapting to the most powerful external influence of the time does not automatically show a true shift in culture. The Nabataeans simply altered their external "look" in order to get the most out of their trade connections.

The extensive use of flora, such as "laurel, grapes, poppies, vine-leaves, pinecones, pomegranates, ivy, [and] wheat,"[73] further shows the ideas of death and renewal on the tomb, ideas that stem from both Greek and Nabataean religious beliefs.

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[70] Robert Wenning, "The Rock-Cut Architecture of Petra," in *Petra Rediscovered,* edited by Peter Markoe, 141. Wenning in fact calls the Khazneh "the most Hellenistic façade at Petra."
[71] Stewart, "The Khazneh," 194, and Xinru Liu, *The Silk Road in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 24-26. Liu states, "At the first level of the façade, six Corinthian columns supported the roof. Above the roof were three niches, also flanked by Corinthian columns…"
[72] Stewart, "The Khazneh," 194.
[73] Ibid., 197.

The pomegranate was especially associated with the Nabataeans and their goddesses, to the point where it was added to the later Nabataean coins, which will be discussed in more detail later. Furthermore, the "vines, pinecones, and drinking-cups added a decidedly Dionysiac and festive touch."[74] While Dionysus was adopted by many Near Eastern cultures into their own pantheons, he was originally a Greek god. These decorations show again the mixing of local and foreign influences acting upon the architecture of Petra and how in order both to retain their own beliefs but remain accessible to foreigners, surface Greek attributes were necessary. The positioning of the Khasneh, as the first building seen as someone enters the city through a long natural corridor known as the Siq, makes it especially important as a symbol of Nabataean metropolitanism. Any trader entering the city would first see this building and, thus, it was necessary that this building to be the premier public façade that would encourage trade and internationalism.

The Khasneh seems to have not been crafted by local artisans, however, but by Alexandrian artists brought in for the occasion.[75] This does not entirely affect the fact that the Nabataean owner of the tomb would have had a say in what was put on the tomb and how it was related to both local and foreign cultures. The use of Hellenized Egyptian artistry does show, however, another influence upon Nabataea. As argued by Judith McKenzie, "It was found that the classical architecture at Petra is a reflection of

[74] Ibid.

[75] Wenning, "The Rock-Cut Architecture of Petra," 141. He states, "It [the Khazneh] is so closely related to Alexandrian palace and tomb architecture (and even iconography) that it is believed to have been worked by Alexandrian artists. As has been observed by many scholars, the second style of Pompeian wall-painting reflects the same Alexandrian tradition as the facades of Petra." The idea of the Khasneh's artists being imported from a foreign source is also stated in Ian Browning's *Petra* on page 117. Even Udi Levi, in *The Lost Civilization of Petra* on page 177, states that the monuments of Petra are a unique blend of Greek and Egyptian motifs.

Alexandrian architecture. The structural elements survive in Alexandria from an earlier date than at any other site. The decorative details on these, such as the capitals and cornices, in the earliest groups at Petra are closely related to the examples in Alexandria."[76] This influence is not unexpected because of two factors: the proximity of the two areas and the long history of trade between the two. As early as Hieronymus of Cardia, Egyptians were trading with the Nabataeans for bitumen which they used in the preservation of mummies.[77] Also, the spread of Hellenism through Egypt and the Near East would also affect the overlap in material culture between these two, otherwise very dissimilar, cultures.

In the first century BCE, Petra began to build even more monuments. One such monument is the Qasr al-Bint, which has been dated to a *terminus post quem* in the beginning of the first century CE.[78] This monument is actually a temple and the only free-standing monument whose walls still exist. The influences, which shaped the decorative pattern on the external surface, show a mixture of both Western and Eastern tradition. The beautiful rose-colored stone monuments of Petra were actually covered in stucco and painted while in use. This use of stucco could show a Roman, Alexandrian, or Palestinian practice. "In Palestine, the decorative stucco discovered in the bathhouse of Herod's Palace at Masada is the best parallel to the Petra decoration system. In Rome, the House of Sallust and the vault of the villa near the Farnesina, dated around 10 BC,

[76] Judith McKenzie, *The Archaeology of Petra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 100.
[77] Diodorus, *Biblioteca*, II.48.3.
[78] McKenzie, *The Archaeology of Petra*, 34. This dating is based on stratigraphic layers from the area containing pottery and an inscription, which shows that it must have been built before an inscription dated to early in the first century CE.

preserve similar architectural stucco."[79] While some argue that the stucco is more in line with one tradition or another, it is hard to decipher. This time period, however, does suggest that some tension between Roman and Eastern influences could have affected Petra.

Under the portico of the Qasr al-Bint are traces in the stucco that show where decorative images may have been placed. It appears that these decorations took on the form of human faces, instead of geometrical and floral patterns, which hold more with the traditional Nabataean motifs. But the use of yellow sandstone gives evidence to the workmanship of local carvers, as does the presence of rosettes, which are linked to Nabataean royalty.[80] Corinthian capitals also point towards a more traditional preference for this temple. Possibly, the *adyton* in the Qasr al-Bint, more than any other feature, shows the core Nabataean culture. "The rear of the *adyton* in the Qasr al-Bint is occupied by a kiosk decorated with an applied order and framed by two raised anta pilasters. Its baetyl, or sacred standing stone, was set on a pavement of which only the bedding (consisting of a stone-and-mortar-filling) remains."[81] The very presence of a "baetyl," or a "god-block," shows the continuing presence of the Nabataean culture. This idea was central to their belief systems and this sacred space not being recycled for some other purpose could well substantiate the idea that the Nabataean culture was able to thrive even with the external pressure from the West and the East.[82]

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[79] Francois Larche and Fawzi Zayadine, "The Qasr al-Bint of Petra," in *Petra Rediscovered*, edited by Peter Markoe, 202.
[80] Ibid., 204.
[81] Francois Larche and Fawzi Zayadine, "The Qasr al-Bint of Petra," 211.
[82] The continuation of the culture is actually a known fact—mainly known by the continuation of the cult of Obodas into the third century CE and architecture from the Roman period that is still distinctly Nabataean in style, which was discussed previously.

The third monument examined is another one of the few free-standing buildings in Petra, the Great Temple. This monument has been excavated in large part by Martha Sharp Joukowsky, who stated, "I believe it to be a religious structure representing the finest workmanship of the Nabataeans and their distinctive native style. This style owed much to the Hellenistic world, but it represents a statement that is peculiarly Nabataean."[83] Situated near the center of the city, containing several public spaces such as a possible temple and theatre, the Great Temple, as a central part of Petraean life and society, will naturally have a combination of elements and cultural influences affecting its design and function.

> The plan of the structure itself is an echo of Hellenistic influences from the west. The temple would have been constructed by Alexandrian masons training Nabataeans, improving the quality of Nabataean free-standing architecture and revealing the extent of their political contact. While constructed in a pastiche style from earlier architectural traditions, the Nabataeans created a structure that is unmistakably Nabataean. The creation of the monumental Great Temple is indeed a hallmark of the shift from their nomadic past, and it represents the eclecticism of these remarkable people.[84]

The Nabataean king would have used such a building to demonstrate the power of his kingdom to those who came to Petra, because the city needed to create the idea of a metropolis which could compete with any other center for trade.

The Great Temple went through several phases of development and reuse. Originally, during the reign of Malichus I or Obodas II, 62 to 9 BCE, the Temple was a Nabataean statement of power which showed their ability to construct a "building of importance" near the main road, used extensively by traders. The second, or at least later, building phase created another statement of strength, but this time it was derived

[83] Martha Sharp Joukowsky, "The Petra Great Temple: A Nabataean Architectural Miracle," 235.
[84] Ibid., 243.

from the Alexandrian style, which was the peak of civilization. It is very likely that the Nabataean king and his ministers decided to redo the building in this manner in order to maintain their status and prove their powerful trade connections and prosperity. This was when the Lower Temenos, pictured below, as it remains now, was conceived.[85] While more modifications came later, before the eventual destruction of the building, each change was made in order to promote Nabataean stature in the international community in which it functioned. But while this required a certain amount of international cosmopolitanism, the Nabataeans were also able to hold on to their own styles and utilize them in this magnificent central building.

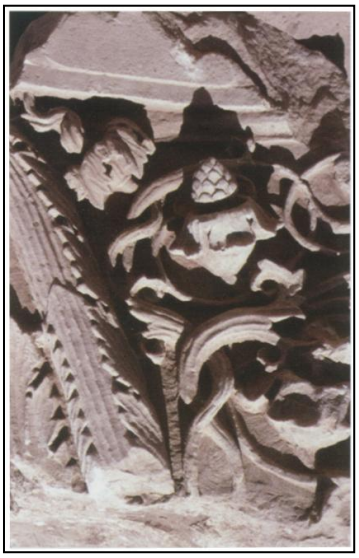

Figure 5.4 Upper Capital

The decorative motif of the Great Temple also follows the flora and fauna patterns that characterize so many Nabataean buildings. The upper section of the temple capitals, figure 5.4., "also abounds with liveliness and is crowned with a proliferation of deeply carved twisting vines, blooming hibiscus flowers, pine cones in high relief, and wavy tendrils…"[86] As noted before, the floral patterns on Nabataean temples recur on many monuments, possibly signaling a local preference for such designs, which, according to Joukowsky, represent flowers local to Nabataea. She even goes on to state that the capitals "combine the native Nabataean spirit with classical traditions."[87] While her point was mostly aesthetic, it can also be applied to the public façade that the Nabataeans used. The Petra

[85] Martha Sharp Joukowsky, "The Petra Great Temple," in *Petra Rediscovered*, edited by Markoe, 219.
[86] Ibid., 244. Figure 5.4 Upper Capital from Joukowsky's article, "The Petra Great Temple: A Nabataean Architectural Miracle," 245 and was taken by A. W. Joukowsky at the Brown Excavation of Petra.
[87] Joukowsky, "The Petra Great Temple: A Nabataean Architectural Miracle," 245.

Great Temple may very well portray the best of the delicate balance of social, political, and economic factors needed for the Nabataeans to stay in power.

Furthermore, by looking at the Lower Temenos, pictured in the foreground of figure 5.5 below, the Nabataean appreciation of and dedication to simplicity appears. This Nabataean style would have left an imprint on all the activities that took place in this central building. Even the temple inside of the structure, for religious or civic services,

Figure 5.5

Lower Temenos of the Petra Great Temple

would have felt the traditional Nabataean influence, even while later being used for Roman councils and possibly even a law court.[88] While the exact use of the temple remains unknown, the fact remains certain that the Petra Great Temple, through all of its phases, was a necessary component to the making of Petra into a strong capital city for a kingdom that relied heavily on its ability to coexist with its neighbors.

Possibly what makes the Nabataeans so extraordinary, and could be at least partly responsible for the length of their independence, is how they could adopt foreign influences and so appear to follow the ideology and culture of whichever kingdom was

[88] Martha Sharp Joukowsky, "The Petra Great Temple," 219.

the most powerful at the time. But the Nabataeans had another skill as well, the ability to internalize their own cultural values and beliefs, such as their independence and traditional gods, keeping them pure, even while changing their public shell to match the political and economic necessities of the time. This core also translates into architectural features, epitomized by the movement back towards traditional and simpler lines. Furthermore, even after the fall of the Nabataean kingdom, monuments continued to be built following Nabataean designs and influence, such as the Palace Tomb and the Tomb of Sextius Florentinus.

While the monuments described above are some of the most well known in Petra, they are eccentric because of the elaborate design and decoration, the Khasneh in particular. "…the vast majority of Petra's tombs, an astounding 94 percent, continued to adhere to the native architectural idiom, and even more amazing 99 percent rejected the Khazneh's figural embellishment. Happy to profit from the Westerner in any way they could, but jealous of their desert heritage, fiercely independent, and resolutely aniconic, the Nabataeans by and large turned their backs on it."[89] It seems that most of the populace preferred the simpler lines that accented the earlier periods of Nabataean history, even as the more complex buildings were necessary to promote the Nabataean standing as traders and merchants. This trend of simplification actually appears in reverse of what might be expected. Dating of architecture can normally be generalized by tracing the increasing complexity of styles. Nabataean architecture, however, is reversed, as the trend toward simplicity becomes stronger as the kingdom becomes more and more involved in the foreign influences around them. This link back to traditional preferences may have heralded some of the trouble that Nabataea would face in the last

[89] Stewart, "The Kazneh," 198. Approximately 800 tombs exist in Petra, but the exact number is debated.

hundred years of its independence, however. By preferring tradition to externally-influenced change, Nabataea may have fallen from its preeminent position as a kingdom which could blend with its neighbors, which in turn damaged its trade relations.[90]

This evolution of simplification helps to demonstrate the Nabataean core preference for cleaner lines—which is even reflected in their preference in worship for "god blocks," simple blocks of stone which represent the deities and will be talked about later. As Judith McKenzie states,

> It was observed that the sculpture, florals and mouldings become simpler, and that floral capitals become less common. Now that the groups have been established there are more examples on which such conclusions may be based. In addition, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the Doric friezes become plainer, and the proportions of the orders change, so that the facades become slightly heavier in appearance. These same changes have been observed on the tombs at Medain Saleh.[91]

Because excavations have now been conducted in many areas of the former Nabataea, evidence has begun to accumulate and will be used to better understand this kingdom. This proof also helps to understand the culture of the Nabataeans, with their protectiveness of their own traditions, even though they had to craft an external shell that gave a cosmopolitan aspect to their capital city and their constructed external culture.

The strength of the true Nabataean culture, however, is evident in the continuation of typical Nabataean architecture styles even after the annexation by Rome. One such example is the Palace Tomb, also known as the Corinthian Tomb. "The reason for its present name lies in a supposed similarity to a Roman palace design…Whether such a claim could be substantiated is beside the point, for the architectural vocabulary is wholly

[90] While this may be in fact be a contributing factor to the fall of Nabataea, the fall of the kingdom is also due to the movement away from overland to sea trade across the Red Sea and Indian Ocean.
[91] McKenzie, *The Architecture of Petra*, 47.

Nabataean. This does not mean that a date in the Nabataean period can be given with certainty, for like so much else in Petra, it displays features which persisted well into the period of Roman occupation…"[92] Like much of the rest of Nabataean culture, the Roman annexation did not signal the complete overhaul of the local architectural preferences. Nabataean features, ideas, and monuments continued.

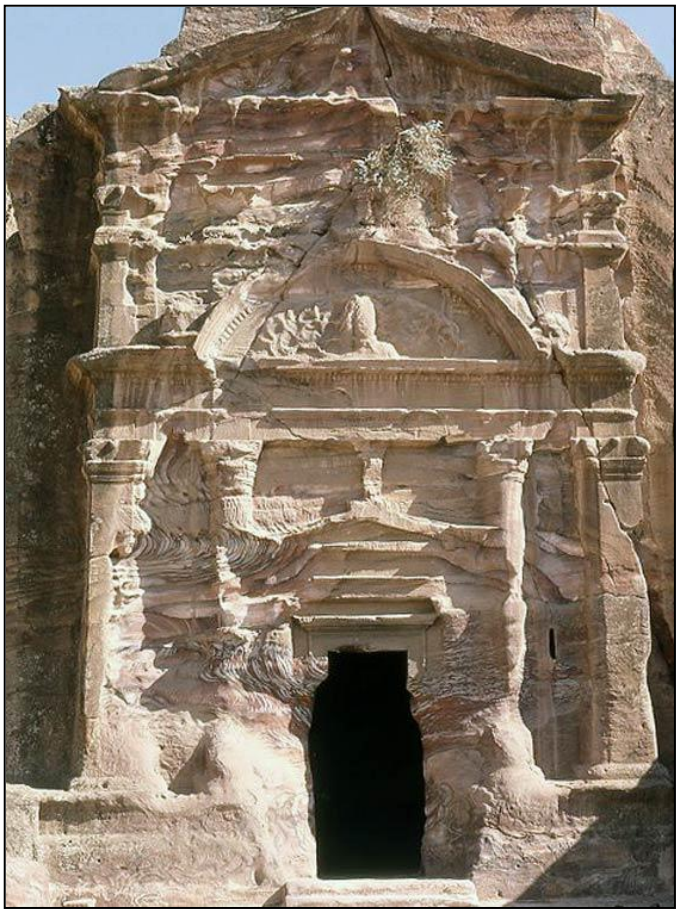

Figure 5.6 Tomb of Sextius Florentinus

The best example of this continuation of Nabataean style is the Tomb of Sextius Florentinus, figure 5.6, who was the Roman Governor of Arabia, who died in 128 or 129 CE.[93] It is unusual for a Roman to have been buried in Petra, but it is possible that since his tomb is also carved in the Nabataean style that he may have been swayed by the locals and possibly have gone a little "native." Ian Browning raises the question about the man himself. "The Nabataean origin of the style raises some interesting speculations as to the character of Sextus [also seen as Sextius] Florentinus. Was he a man who came to have a real and deep affection for Petra…so much so that he wished to be buried in their city and to be commemorated

[92] Browning, *Petra*, 220.
[93] McKenzie, *The Archaeology of Petra*, 33.

in their 'style'?...The inscriptions definitely quote his will…to be buried there."[94] Clearly, even after the annexation of Nabataea, the people continued their own customs and were still influential enough a generation later to sway a Roman governor's manner and loyalties.[95] Whether or not Sextius Florentinus preferred the Nabataean people, his tomb speaks of the dual cultures of Rome and Nabataea.

While clearly Nabataean, its Roman influence cannot be dismissed, which makes sense in the context of Sextius Florentinus' Roman citizenship. "The façade is a complex but yet a very simple design in which the Nabat[a]ean penchant for a multiplicity of lines and projections was handled with great restraint and sureness of touch…The surmounting pediment is of a slightly higher pitch than usual but this could well be due to a strong Roman influence."[96] Also, plain Nabataean capitals decorate the tomb, as can be seen in the picture above. The visual simplicity of the face of this tomb harkens back to the continuous simplification of Nabataean designs described above. As Browning stated, the Nabataeans had a "penchant" for lines, which is clearly distinguishable on this tomb, from just above the doorway all the way to the pediment at the top of tomb. While the tomb is badly damaged and therefore exact knowledge of the decorative aspects are uncertain, it does not appear to be excessively decorated as would be a more Hellenized or Romanized monument, such as the Khasneh. While, again, damage makes it hard to know for sure, the center figure may be the head of Medusa,[97] which would show the prevalence of Greco-Roman mythology. Setting that feature in an otherwise truly Nabataean monument shows the complicated social background of Sextius Florentinus.

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[94] Browning, *Petra*, 224.
[95] "Loyalties" in this case does not imply that he in any way betrayed Rome, but that his cultural allegiance seems to have shifted to his surrogate home and eventual final resting place.
[96] Browning, *Petra,* 224.
[97] Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*, 99.

Nabataean architecture shows the many influences that acted upon the kingdom during, and after, its independence. Greece, Egypt, Iran, Syria, India, Rome, and many others all left their mark in stone on this kingdom which lived by its ability to blend with its trade partners. Nabataea, however, did not lose its own culture because of these external pressures. While the evidence creates a convincing picture of a society that deliberately altered its public appearance for economic stability, many questions are still unanswered. But through the evidence provided by the return to simple architectural lines and tombs such as that of Sextius Florentinus, archaeologists and historians are able to piece together more about this culture. The use of material remains is necessary in place of written documentation, but requires the same level of interpretation. By continuing to use the surviving material culture, large and small scale, the public façade of the Nabataeans becomes ever clearer and creates a more complete picture of the effects on the kingdom through its existence. Without full understanding of public monuments, in conjunction with private objects, a comprehensive idea of the dual culture of the Nabataeans remains obscured.

Chapter 6
Religion

The religion of the Nabataeans has survived in a patchwork of gods, sacred high places, and the remaining broken pieces of material culture. Reconstructing the beliefs of a people is difficult under the best of circumstances, but with the Nabataeans much contradictory information and many contrasting theories try to make the best of what remains. This section focuses less on the religion itself, which is ingeniously laid out in several works referred to by this author,[98] and tries instead to explain how the Nabataean society managed to maintain their central beliefs, represented distinctly by their god blocks, but also intentionally incorporated foreign aspects of deities and whole deities themselves into their pantheon and worship. This syncretism[99] was used to alter the outward characteristics of the Nabataean religion and society to promote economic and political relations with their neighbors, just as when applied to other facets of their culture.

[98] For a more complete history and explanation of Nabataean religion several secondary sources should be referenced: John F. Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), Nelson Glueck, *Deities and Dophins: The Story of the Nabataeans* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), Philip C. Hammond, "The Medallion and Block Relief at Petra," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 192 (1968), as well as many more.

[99] This use of syncretism has none of the pejorative overtones that the term has begun to acquire. Here it is simply used as a description of the way in which one culture can pick up traits from another. As Healey stated, "The term syncretistic is also used in a pejorative way within a frame of thinking about religion: there were the ancient pure religions, then these declined into syncretism prior to a renewal of pure religion." (Healey, *A Conspectus*, 14) While this may have its place in some arguments, that is not its place or meaning in this context.

As John Healey states, "Religion…is an aspect of culture, part of a social construction of reality which man treats as if it were external in origin. Societies and individuals construct the world about them…What is important to him or her is what a community believed…"[100] This definition of religion is especially fitting for the Nabataean culture, as they used it not only to give order to the chaos of the world, but to strengthen their own position in that world, in relation to their neighbors. If trade is what was important to the Nabataeans, then the community believed in the gods that promoted trade relations and productivity, even if their physical aspects or worship was adopted from surrounding areas. While the inclusion of new gods into a pantheon could be attributed to the influences moving through the kingdom along trade lines, the continuous use of god blocks shows that the society never truly moved away from the original minimalist expression of their beliefs. The adoption of foreign traits could, therefore, possibly be labeled as the attempt for the Nabataeans to blend with their partners externally.

While the Nabataeans commonly used temples and processional ways in the practice of their beliefs, possibly the most visible example of the original culture of the Nabataeans is seen in their adherence to the worship of god blocks and sacred high places. Through these two traditional facets of Nabataean religion, the continuation of established Nabataean belief stays strong even with outside influences moving through the kingdom. Even after the shift from featureless to anthropomorphic deities, the connection of foreign gods with the main local gods, and the use of Greco-Roman gods and myths in temples and private spaces, these two seemingly simple features carry on.

[100] John F. Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 3.

While their meaning may not be entirely clear to modern historians, their place in the culture is eminently understandable.

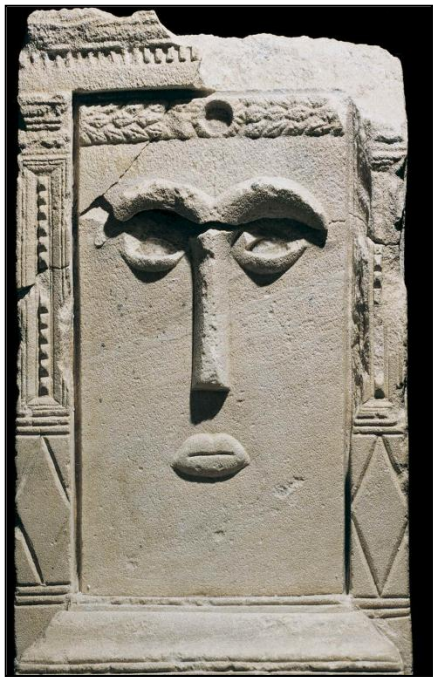

Figure 6.1 Nabataean "Eye-Idol"

Across the Nabataean kingdom god blocks, djinn blocks, or simply stone pillars are found.[101] These blocks represented the main gods of the Nabataean religion, especially Dushara. "The use of the betyl, usually without any facial markings, is typical of the Nabataeans…The god himself, being spiritual, could not be portrayed."[102] These faceless and very simple blocks of stone number in the low twenties at Petra alone and have been found at nearly every religious site across the kingdom.[103] This representation showed the reverence of the Nabataeans by not depicting any characteristics of the god himself. Unlike the Greek or Romans, the Nabataeans did not incorporate human attributes into their representations of the divine, something that would not change even after extensive contact with those societies.

It is not entirely certain which gods were represented by which blocks. In some cases the blocks are set up in groupings of three; one such example is seen at Petra and could depict three separate gods and goddesses. "While it is reasonable to assume that each betyl represents a different deity, some coin depictions of three steles are

[101] Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans,* 82, Healey, *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 34, and Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus*, 155-156.
[102] Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus*, 155.
[103] Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*, 82.

accompanied by the name of Dushara only."[104] There is no doubt, however, that these blocks were meant to represent deities. Some later blocks even had the faintest outline of a face added to them in order to create a more specific symbol of the gods. This "eye-idol" shown above, figure 6.1, is one of the best known of the stylized god blocks.[105] Whether they were free standing or attached to bases, god blocks were assuredly a part of worship, even though their specific meanings are still mysterious to modern archaeologists and historians.

Beyond the significance of the god blocks, their continuous usage is important to understand as a measure for the retention of traditional Nabataean culture. While Hellenistic and Roman culture bombarded the Nabataean kingdom throughout its history, the god blocks and foundational religious devotion of the Nabataeans stayed consistent at its most fundamental ideas. This is demonstrated by these relatively similar blocks still being found into the last phase of Nabataean history, Glueck's "Period III." "It seems certain that in Period I, the gods were represented by rough-hewn slabs of stone, and in changing form in Period II, but by Period III in the second century A.D., their humanized figures could be seen sculptured in relief in considerable number at Khirbet Tannur. Variations of featureless Dushara forms may well have continued, however, also in Period III."[106] This continuation of the "featureless Dushara" shows how strong Nabataean culture stayed at its core, even by the end of the independent kingdom.

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[104] Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus*, 155.
[105] More information on this idol can be found in Taylor's *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*, 106, where she says, "One of the most extraordinary and beautiful Nabataean cultic images was…a small rectangular block of stone with almond-shaped eye recesses beneath prominent brows, a long straight nose and oval mouth, all carved within a simple border. It is pure Nabataean in style, with no Hellenistic influence, the stylized features the only concession to an anthropomorphic representation of a god."
[106] Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 91.

Another traditional feature of Nabataean religion is the "sacred high place." Found at various religious sites and very common at Petra, these open flat areas are connected to cultic sacrifices and possibly even sun worship.[107] Jane Taylor theorized, "It may be that high places were created by a still nomadic people at various points along their seasonal routes, for them to return to when their journeyings brought them back to the same places year in, year out…"[108] This theory helps support the idea that the nomadic culture from which the Nabataeans grew remained prominent even after the wanderings of the people had been contained to caravan routes. The continuous use of these high places is evidenced by the pottery sherds found from all periods of Nabataean development, as well as the prominence of cultic rites through the Roman Period.[109]

These two traditional aspects of religion may have held out against external influences, but as it is so adept at doing, the Nabataean kingdom used syncretism in public areas in order to keep their culture and religion on an even footing with that of the powers around them. With the sweeping changes Hellenism and Romanism made to the cultures around the Mediterranean, Nabataea was bound to be swayed, publicly and privately, by some of the new gods and ideas that came through the region. But, unlike Taylor's assertion that there was a "wholesale abandonment" of the Nabataean religious tradition, even in the private realm,[110] elements of these outside cultures were picked and also preserved the identities of the original Nabataean gods. As with architectural

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[107] Healey, *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions*, 35, and Udi Levy, *The Lost Civilization of Petra* (Edinburgh: Floris., 1999), 66-67. As I stated before, I do not agree with several of the conclusions drawn in Udi Levi's book because of the way he analyzes the historical data, but for the sake of deeper understanding of the topic and all possibilities concerning sacred high places I have included him in this section.

[108] Jane Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*, 139.

[109] Pottery sherd evidence is seen in Stephen Schmid, "Nabataean Pottery," in *Petra Rediscovered*, edited by Glenn Markoe. Cultic rites are explained in more detail in John Healey's *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions* and Nelson Glueck's *Deities and Dolphins.*

[110] Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Civilization of the Nabataeans*, 92.

features, the Nabataeans managed to blend their own religious preferences with Greco-Roman forms in order to retain that distinct style that so defines the Nabataean culture.

The blending of styles is clearly visible in the movement from the barely-there face of the god blocks to fully-formed anthropomorphic god images, especially on temples and in public and a few private murals and reliefs. Greek gods become a common image on Nabataean temples and houses, especially by 100 CE. This mix of images was found all around the Nabataean kingdom, not just in Petra proper. "Above the doorway of one of the houses [in Qasr Rabbah], set among other decorated building stones of Nabataean origin, is a defaced winged Eros, closely related in style to one depicted in a handsome and unique Nabataean mural at el-Bared near Petra."[111] The inclusion of Greco-Roman gods was a public motif used to help shape the external façade, but also became a private motif as Hellenistic influence became more and more powerful in the Transjordan area.

The god Dushara was the "supreme" god of the Nabataeans and therefore the equivalent of Zeus. But beyond this connection, Dushara also became associated with Dionysus, Helios, Hadad, and Ba'al-Shamin, as well as others.[112] These relationships show that Greco-Roman influences were snot the only ones exerting themselves upon Nabataea. These gods may, however, be some of the easiest to identify. Also, found at Qasr Rabbah is a "bust of a defaced Helios-Apollo in high relief," which is fitting in a Nabataean town because Dushara came to be associated with both Helios and Apollo, as stated above.[113] Greco-Roman gods that share characteristics with Dushara are the more

[111] Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 57.
[112] Fawzi Zayadine, "The Nabataean Gods and Their Sanctuaries," in *Petra Rediscovered*, 57 and Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 193-209.
[113] Ibid., 55-56, 58.

common motifs found at Nabataean sites, as is evidenced in the many examples provided in Nelson Glueck's *Deities and Dolphins*. Similarly popular are statues of Aphrodite and Isis, who became associated with the three Nabataean goddesses, namely Al-'Uzza.[114]

Beyond these Greco-Roman reinterpretations of traditional Nabataean gods, one god stands out as being firmly rooted in the Nabataean nomadic past. This god is Shay' al-Quam, a protector of nomadic peoples and designated as the one "who drinks no wine."[115] This epithet is directly linked to the description of the Nabataeans given by Diodorus. Diodorus states, "It is their custom neither to plant grain, set out any fruit-bearing tree, use wine, nor construct any house; and if anyone is found acting contrary to this, death is his penalty."[116] The perseverance of Shay' al-Quam through the end of the Nabataean independence, as demonstrated by the appearance of inscriptions dedicated to him at Palmyra, shows a continuation of the traditional ideas of the Nabataeans. With the adoption of Dionysus and other Greco-Roman gods, Shay' al-Quam creates a type of paradox because the characteristics of the Greco-Roman gods are distinctly opposed to the strict beliefs associated with Shay' al-Quam. That the old Nabataean god is not displayed as prominently as the Greco-Roman gods were, eventually, may show the differences in private and public religion. The more opulent gods were put on public monuments, while the desert-dwelling, trade god was held closer to his people. This is especially pertinent to understanding the lasting nature of this culture, because Shay' al-Quam is not particularly suited to a sedentary lifestyle. While the Nabataeans may have

[114] Ibid., 55-56 and Fawzi Zayadine, "The Nabataean Gods and Their Sanctuaries," in *Petra Rediscovered*, 62-64.
[115] Zayadine, "The Nabataean Gods and Their Sanctuaries," 60.
[116] Diodorus, *Bibliotheca*, XIX.94.3. The text actually reads, "νόμος δ᾽ ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς μήτε σῖτον σπείρειν μήτε φυτεύειν μηδὲν φυτὸνκαρποφόρον μήτε οἶνῳ χρᾶσθαι μήτε οἰκίαν κατασκευάζειν: ὃς δ᾽ ἂν παρὰτα ῦτα ποιῶν εὑρίσκηται, θάνατον αὐτῷ πρόστιμον εἶναι."

still been tied to desert travel through their trade movements, as a culture, they settled into a permanent lifestyle long before Shay' al-Quam was lost from their pantheon.

The Nabataean trait of adopting only those parts of a culture that make it look the most inoffensive to those powers around it is quite evident in the religion, especially in the differences between public and private areas. As religion had a public and governmental aspect to it, because it is seen almost exclusively in public areas, this must have been intentional. The adoption of Greco-Roman characteristics and even the anthropomorphism demonstrate an adaptation in Nabataea to the empires surrounding it. The resilience of the god blocks, the eye idol, the sacred high places, and the nomad protector god make apparent the strength of the Nabataean basic culture, even as the more superficial aspects of the culture shifted to protect the kingdom and its place in the power structure of the Near East.

Chapter 7
Pottery, Statues, and Figurines

The "minor arts" of pottery, sculpture, and figurines, as classified by Philip C. Hammond,[117] provide a great amount of information about the styles which the Nabataeans enjoyed, both locally produced and imported. These styles, and the chronology in which they appear, show outside influences upon the culture, as well as resurgences in the popularity of traditional designs. While, unlike monumental archaeology, these smaller artifacts may have been produced based on the convenience of certain styles rather than a deliberate choice between local and foreign, they still reveal the tastes of those that used them. These tastes were significantly influenced by the pressures on the Nabataean kingdom and the suppression of these exterior influences through the appreciation and renaissance of traditional designs.

Nabataean pottery is a minor art, but one that has a substantial impact on understanding Nabataean culture. The sherds found are of a quality that would not be expected of a people that were nomadic for most of their history. The best known, and finest, Nabataean pottery is the "fine ware," called NPFW. These pieces have been described repeatedly, but with little variation from the original wording. "Horsfield was the first to distinguish the NPFW as distinct from Roman and other ceramic traditions, noting its "eggshell"- thin walls… [it was] described as being decorated with a variety of

[117] Philip C. Hammond, *The Nabataeans—Their History, Culture and Archaeology*, 81.

designs in purple paint, and not resembling classical ceramics."[118] "Eggshell" -thin is the most common way to describe this pottery style, but the most impressive detail is that even though pottery came late to the Nabataeans, not being produced until the first century BC,[119] the style was distinct from both Greek and Roman designs.

The first phase of Nabataean pottery development began around the very end of the second century BCE and ended at some point between 50 and 25 BCE. The next period lasted from this time to approximately the end of the first century CE, and the final phase stretched until the fourth century CE, although there is some disagreement on this end date.[120] These periods have an unusual quality, however. Instead of the production process becoming more refined as time passed, pottery from the earliest period is actually finer than that of the latest period, which is thicker, heavier, and painted with less fluidity. As Glueck states, "…Nabataean pottery had already attained a very high stage of development before the end of Period I, that is, well before the close of the first century B.C."[121] This peak of production so early in the development of the Nabataean kingdom could be due to the possibility that they learned this craft from the Edomites before them. Phase, or Period, I pottery shares many similarities with Late Edomite pottery.[122] This correlation, however, does not explain the curious decline of pottery standards later in Nabataean history.

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[118] Benjamin Dolinka, *Nabataean Aila (Aqaba, Jordan) from a Ceramic Perspective: Local and Intra-Regional Trade in Aqqba Ware During the 1st and 2nd Centuries AD* (London: Archaeopress, 2003), 35.
[119] Negev, *Nabataean Archeology Today*, 30-31.
[120] Dolikna, 40, Negev, *Nabataean Archeology Today*, 23-25, and Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 138. There is disagreement as to the methods and interpretations made by some archaeologists.
[121] Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 102. The same idea of starting with a very high production qualities and falling off after the annexation by Rome is expressed in Negev's *Nabataean Archeology Today*, 30-31.
[122] Browning, *Petra*, 32.

The Nabataeans did not truly produce their own pottery until the first century BCE. This classifies all pottery which dates to before that time as imported. This complete reliance on imported pottery affected the Nabataean style from the very beginning. This clearly Western influence on a culture that was mainly Near Eastern in make-up is difficult to understand unless one remembers that for nearly 200 years after they appear in Diodorus' account, the Nabataeans were nomadic. "As nomads, the Nabataeans would not have required a highly developed material culture and would (in all likelihood) have produced non-permanent craftwork…"[123] The creation of pottery in the Hellenistic style, then, would make sense, since the Hellenistic kingdoms near Nabataea would have been the strongest and most influential. Also, because of their status as trading partners,[124] it seems likely that the Nabataeans would have learned about shapes and decorative patterns from the pottery to which they had been exposed.

Phase I of Nabataean pottery, beginning around 100 BCE and ending between 50 and 25 BCE, is defined by its shapes and decorative motifs. The shapes are Hellenistic in origin. They are gently rounded and are mostly of bowl and drinking vessel types, although some amphorae have been found.[125] The motifs are quite plain—simple lines in red or purple paint.[126] These become more and more stylized in the next phase, as the

[123] Stephen Schmid, "Nabataean Pottery," in *Petra Rediscovered*, 76.
[124] As is stated in Diodorus and Strabo, the Nabataeans traded in bitumen, frankincense, and myrrh from the earliest parts of their history. These goods were extremely important to the Egyptians and the Greeks for religious purposes, as well as the preservation of the dead in the case of the Egyptians.
[125] Stephen Schmid, "Nabataean Pottery," in *Petra Rediscovered*, 76.
[126] Photographs of pottery, figures 7.1-7.2, found in chapter 6, "Nabataean Pottery," in *Petra Rediscovered*, edited by Markoe, 76.

Nabataean individuality begins to assert itself within the production of pottery.

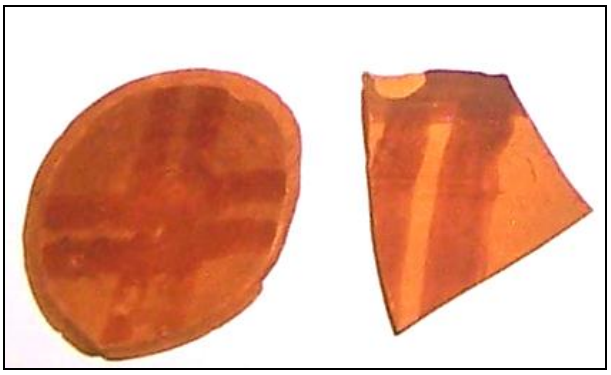
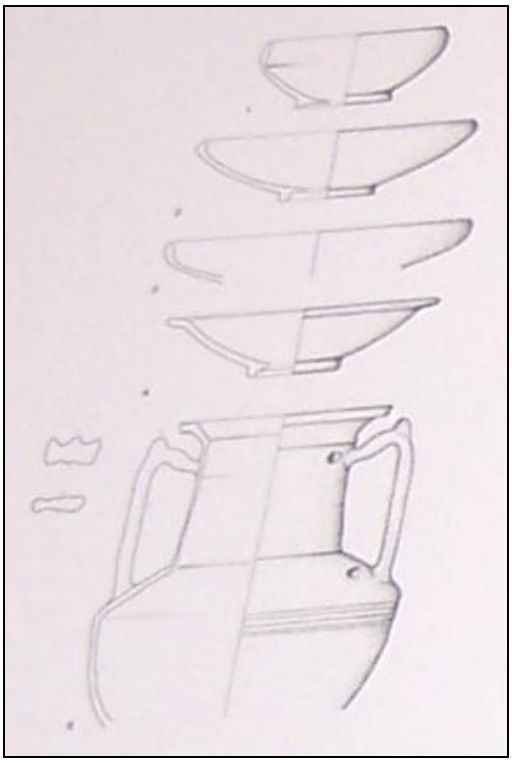
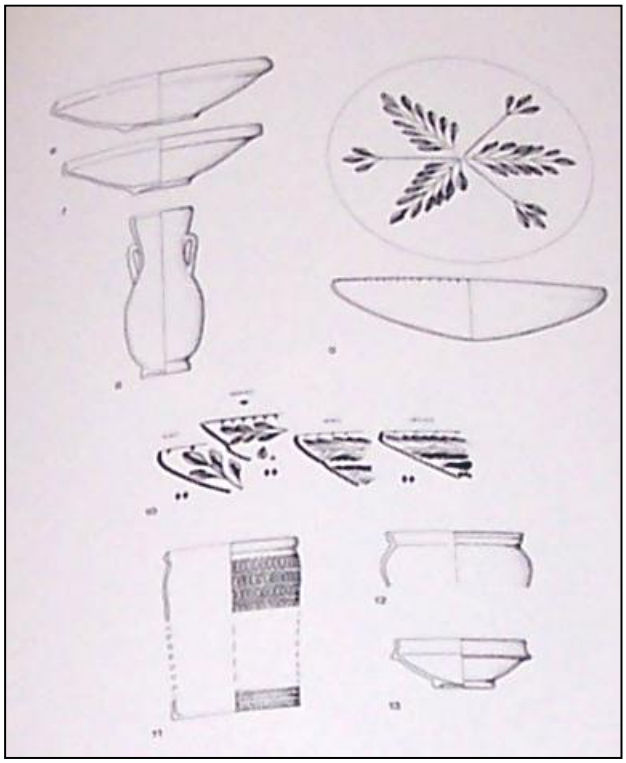


Figure 7.1 (left) Painted Phase I Motifs

Figure 7.2 (below, left) Plain Phase I Pottery

Figure 7.3 (below, right) Phase II Pottery





Phase II, dated to begin in 50 BC,[127] was an elaboration on the previous styles. The shapes became more angular and began to move away from Hellenistic models to incorporate some more of the Near Eastern tradition. This tradition also appears in the decoration of the vessels. "The painting consists of simple floral motifs, fleshy leaves, or groups of leaves forming limbs in red color, the same as the surface slip so prominent in

[127] Schmid, "Nabataean Pottery," in *Petra Rediscovered*, 77.

Phase 1…"[128] With very few exceptions, the decorative elements in Nabataean pottery are derived from nature. The exceptions, especially in Phase II, come from Late Hellenistic and Early Roman influences and are anthropomorphic. As Stephen Schmid states, "Such applied masks [the face of a bearded man in relief on a jug] are very common in late Hellenistic or early Roman Imperial pottery and, more specifically, in luxury bronze and silver vessels. While the prototype of form for the molded face on our jug may have been imported from the Mediterranean, the vessel itself is clearly a local product."[129] These decorative types show how western influences continued to affect the Nabataean style. The rarity of these examples, however, shows that Nabataean potters moved away from these influences as they developed an independent style.

Since Nabataean society was originally completely dependent on imports for their pottery necessities, it made sense that their earliest locally made pottery would reflect those styles—typically in shape, decoration, and color. This does not show a deliberate attempt to make themselves seem more approachable to their trading partners. Unlike with larger architectural features, pottery choices would seem to be more about convenience than purposeful maneuvering. With the start of local pottery manufacturing, however, artisans could create their own designs.[130] This is evidenced by the sharper-edged bowls and vessels that appear in Phase II, as well as the change in motifs. Resurgence in Near Eastern trends, as shown by the floral motifs and the shift towards

[128] Ibid. Figure 7.3 also comes from *Petra Rediscovered* and demonstrates the different vessel types and decorative motifs that develop in Phase 2.
[129] Schmid, "Nabataean Pottery," in *Petra Rediscovered*, 77.
[130] Dolinka, *Nabataean Aila from a Ceramic Perspective,* 58. Petra was the main, if not only, production center for Nabataean pottery. "…all of the NPFW (Nabataean Fine Ware) discovered…exhibited an identical chemical fingerprint to the pottery and clay samples from Petra…Sites such as Udruh and Aila may be seen as secondary centres of Nabataean pottery production…"

Mesopotamian and Iranian styles around 25 BCE,[131] could have been a deliberate choice to reach out to Nabataea's eastern contacts. While most of their pottery seems to have been for local use, supported by the rarity of sherds found in foreign territories, the Nabataeans would still have been able to bolster their trade appeal on either side of their kingdom by drawing inspiration from both sides. This would have been especially important as they were solidifying their position in the region and making their final transition from a nomadic to a sedentary people.

About twenty-five years after this shift to traditional Near Eastern styles, the Nabataeans again changed their pottery styles. While the evolution of the pottery shapes continues, the foreign influence upon the pottery, both from the East and the West, vanishes.[132] While the reason for this shift is not known, it could simply be ascribed to the preference for local designs. At this period, there are no particularly strong influences upon Nabataea. Nabataean trade was lucrative, Hellenism had come to its end politically, and Rome has not fully developed its power yet and is engaged elsewhere. It could have been a safe time for the Nabataeans to worry less about how they were viewed by others and concentrate on their own preferences, especially if the pottery was being used for private household functions. This marked the beginning of the end, however, for Phase II of Nabataean pottery.

Phase III was heavily influenced by Roman preferences and imported styles, but pieces of Phase II typology are still produced. "At the beginning of Phase 3 there are still traces of the decorative patterns

[131] Schmid, "Nabataean Pottery," in *Petra Rediscovered*, 77-78.
[132] Ibid., 78.

as in the later phase of the previous Phase 2…The distinctive new elements are the forms: the most important type is a very flat bowl…This basic type will remain the most important form in Nabataean painted pottery for about a century."[133] But, under the kingship of Rabbel II, known as "the one who renewed his people," "there occurred a strong shift/tendency away from western (Hellenistic and Roman) elements toward a more traditional Arabic expression in Nabataean art and culture."[134] This resurgence may have been linked to attempts to lessen Roman influence on the kingdom or an attempt to allay some of the problems stemming from the loss of trade because of the increase of Roman shipping in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean.[135] The last phase of Nabataean pottery comes just before the annexation by Rome, at approximately CE 100. These vessels are poorly formed, much thicker than anything previous, and decorated only with thick black lines and some decoration which lacked the refinement of anything earlier, as seen in figure 7.4 above.[136] This final stage of Nabataean pottery accurately reflects the political culture of the time as well. The downward trend in the artistry of the pottery mirrored the political and economic decline of Nabataea and is seen in other forms of material culture, such as locally-minted coins.[137] The annexation was inevitable

Figure 7.4 Phase III Pottery

[133] Schmid, "Nabataean Pottery," in *Petra Rediscovered,* 80.
[134] Ibid., 80.
[135] Idem.
[136] Figure 7.4 found in Schmid, "Nabataean Pottery," in *Petra Rediscovered*, 81.
[137] In the first century CE, Nabataea declined politically, economically, and artistically, but while a correlation between these areas exist, a direct connection is still obscure. While this would be an interesting topic to pursue, it does not relate precisely to the topic at hand and, therefore, will not be included more fully in this work.

and "with the loss of their political independence, the Nabataeans also lost their innovative spirit…"[138]

Another group of pottery which follows some of the same chronological periods and influences is the ceramic oil lamp. While separating the two may seem unnecessary, studying the oil lamp by itself also provides evidence concerning chronology and influences upon local Nabataean products. Many lamp types were originally imported and then the molds were copied by Nabataean artisans, usually with small changes that accounted for local taste. This process may show the Nabataeans had a tendency to use parts of the cultures with whom they traded to create their façade, especially with items of material culture that played a role in public life, which would have been partly regulated by the ruling government as public life was under state control to some extent. Lamps were a necessary part of the Nabataean culture; used in religious practices, for sacrifices and in temples. They were also used in private life as funerary offerings, as can be seen by their presence at numerous grave sites.[139] In order to continue trade, the Nabataeans could have adopted lamp styles from the Greco-Roman world, but then subtly altered them in order to account for their own personal preferences.

Hellenistic-style lamps date from the mid-second century BCE through the first century CE. Lamp styles associated with contemporary Syria have also been found, indicating that influences from both east and west of Nabataea were taken into account—both as trade goods and models worthy of local copy.[140] So-called "delphinform" lamps from this time period reflect the Greek motif and influence of the dolphin on this desert people. As Nelson Glueck stated, "It was especially from the West that the East

[138] Schmid, "Nabataean Pottery," in *Petra Rediscovered,* 81.
[139] Barrett, *The Ceramic Oil Lamp as an Indicator of Cultural Change,* 58-59.
[140] Ibid., 68-70.

borrowed the dolphin theme. This symbol underscored in part the profound Nabataean and Parthian concern with life after death."[141] This adoption of dolphin imagery so early in Nabataean ceramic history shows the influence of the cultures surrounding the kingdom, as well as the adaptability of a people whose wealth and stability was dependent on their peaceful relations with more powerful neighbors. At the same time, however, the "Syrian lamp type" with its olive wreath handle also shows the Near Eastern motif tradition,[142] which is at the core of Nabataean culture. By using both Hellenistic and Syrian forms in this era, the Nabataeans show their talent for syncretism, through the adoption of the "delphinform," but without sacrificing their individuality, which stems from their core connection to the Near East. Instead of creating their own unique style, the blending of the two foreign influences could have allowed the Nabataeans to combine both outside pressures creating a mixed style alongside a public cultural face.

Overlapping this time period, from the first century BCE through the first century CE, are Roman style lamps, both imported and copied, as well as uniquely Nabataean style lamps. Examples of locally made copies of Roman lamp types are the rosette lamps and the scallop shell motif. Where these two examples differ is in their interpretation. The rosette-style lamps could represent two different ideas—the adoption of a Roman pattern or the entirely unique Nabataean "omega."[143] Where Barrett, in *The Ceramic Oil*

[141] Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 243. While is it is no way uncommon for a culture to adopt a symbol without the accompanying belief in the power behind that symbol, this does not seem to be the case with the dolphin and the Nabataeans. Glueck makes the argument that the Nabataeans fully believed in the power of the dolphin as a symbol of the afterlife, even though their people, even traders, would have rarely, if ever, come into contact with a real dolphin. For more information on this complex ideology, please see Glueck's *Deities and Dolphins.*

[142] Barrett, *The Ceramic Oil Lamp…*, 70.

[143] Barrett, *The Ceramic Oil Lamp…*, 76 and Patrich, *The Formation of Nabataean Art*, 130.

Lamp as an Indicator of Cultural Change, sees a copy of a popular Roman style, Patrich, in *The Formation of Nabataean Art*, sees an individual stylistic element. As Patrich states, "Nabataean originality and avoidance of imitation of the surrounding Hellenistic-Roman culture applies to oil lamps as well. There are two types that can be considered original: one bears a design that resembles the Greek letter omega on its circumference, and the other is decorated with volutes on the nozzle."[144] This interpretation shows the independence of Nabataean style, adding to the evidence that the kingdom retained its original culture even in the face of extreme external pressure.

The second example of the scallop shell motif demonstrates an opposite idea. This lamp type, although made locally, shows the syncretism in Nabataean religion, as well as pottery styles. "A most popular Roman decoration, the shell completely fills the discus of the lamp and this symbol was appropriated by the Nabataeans for their goddesses Allat and Al-'Uzza, who shared water attributes similar to Aphrodite."[145] The use of this design shows how the Nabataeans were able to reconcile their beliefs with those of other powers, such as that of Rome. Allat and Al-'Uzza were distinct goddesses, but both shared an affinity for water, which later allowed their individuality to be merged with other foreign deities. By mixing the attributes of these goddesses, the Nabataeans demonstrate a willingness to adjust to the influences moving through their kingdom, namely along the trade and caravan routes. This willingness strengthened the external skin of the culture so that it would be able to survive mostly intact for a hundred years after the loss of its political independence.

[144] Patrich, *The Formation of Nabataean Art*, 130-131.
[145] Barrett, *The Ceramic Oil Lamp…*, 78.

The Nabataeans also twisted the mythology of the Greco-Roman world for their own purposes. This can clearly be seen on a lamp which depicts Eros in chains found in the Great Temple at Petra. This use of a common Greek deity has been identified as "a deliberate construction of the foreign out of the familiar,"[146] referring to the alteration of a familiar myth into something very different. By reconstructing some of the Greco-Roman *mythoi*, the Nabataeans could more easily reconcile the foreign with their own world. This is yet another example of Nabataean syncretism. The creation of a non-cherub "convict" Eros shows how the Nabataeans understood what was popular in their own culture, but still added that distinctive flair. "Pictoral discus lamps, particularly featuring the human image, were not part of the Nabataean indigenous lamp repertoire (Patrich 1990a:192), but were favored imports…thus, in response to popular demand, a hybridized lamp evolved, a new lamp, which was as foreign to the Nabataeans as it was to the Romans."[147] While this characterization may not be entirely accurate, it does show that the Nabataeans were not afraid, as Barrett argues, to create a new form in order to satisfy popular demand. This creative approach to finding the middle ground between the foreign and the commonplace is how they managed nearly all their affairs, from politics to the "minor arts."

Beyond the imports and their copies are also truly indigenous forms of Nabataean lamps. These have been broken into two types, named by Barrett as Volute type A and Volute type B, which were produced through the end of the first century CE.[148] Notably, on Volute type B "…is a symbol, which might represent a chalice, torch or candlestick, consisting of a hemispherical body and a trumpet base (Khairy 1984:10; 1990:11).

[146] Barrett, *The Ceramic Oil Lamp…*, 135.
[147] Ibid., 158.
[148] Barrett, *The Ceramic Oil Lamp…*, 85. Also see Negev, *Nabataean Archeology Today*, 134-138.

Negev (1974:29) identifies this symbol as 'a double cornucopia, like the one found on the coins of Aretas IV.' Such a symbol is restricted to the Nabataean lamps and so far has never been recorded elsewhere (Khairy 1984:11)."[149] Although they have some differences, these two types of lamps show that Nabataean artisans created their own designs based on ideas and patterns other than those provided by outside influences, either to the West or the East. A symbol which cannot be traced to another culture provides evidence of a unique base culture for the Nabataeans, one that stayed strong throughout its long history of interactions with others.

Pure Nabataean styles, both of oil lamps and fine ware pottery (as stated above), disappeared in the third century CE. With the loss of political independence, Nabataean culture became somewhat submissive to its Roman counterpart. "The local copies also supplanted the indigenous volute lamp, which disappeared after the first century CE, whereas the local copies remained popular until the third century CE, a presence noted at other sites…The extremely delicate Nabataean finewares began to disappear at the time, to be superseded by a more robust version."[150] While Nabataean culture did not die out immediately, it was stifled after the annexation by Rome.[151] But the basic culture of Nabataea was strong enough that the local copies were able to continue production until the disappearance of the culture as a whole, nearly 200 years after the annexation.

[149] Ibid., 85-86.
[150] Barrett, *The Ceramic Oil Lamp…*, 137. This is also stated in Dolinka's *Nabataean Aila from a Ceramic Perspective*, 58.
[151] This is further explained by Stephen Schmid, in chapter 6 of *Petra Rediscovered*, when, on page 81, he states, "No new elements are added to the (once innovative) Nabataean pottery tradition after the Roman take-over. The patterns of painting and the basic shapes of the plates and bowls remain the same as in the late first century AD, and are simply more degenerated."

Statuary

Statuary has been found from every phase of Nabataean history. The chronology, while difficult to specify exactly, would seem to follow a similar path to that of its fellow "minor arts," pottery and oil lamps. The influences, however, are quite clear, as was their ability to maintain their own original culture. As Glueck argues, "As merchants extraordinary, their affairs and interests were cosmopolitan in scope and they could easily have become completely imitative in culture. That, under the pressure of all these circumstances…they were able to retain and furthermore sharpen their distinctive identity, is little short of a miracle."[152] The pressures of East and West shaped the statuary of the Nabataeans, but they maintained their own style and their own individuality, even while adopting some characteristics from their neighbors in order to masquerade as more closely related to that neighbor's culture. Some of the most well studied statues, mostly made of stone, come from Khirbet et-Tannur, which was the main focus of Nelson Glueck's *Deities and Dolphins.* By studying these statues, the mix of "Hellenism and Orientalism" becomes clear.[153] The Nabataeans demonstrate their place as middle men between opposing cultures through the use of Greco-Roman mythology, of torques, and of the distinct proportions in the carvings.

The Nabataeans adopted Greco-Roman gods into their own mythology by linking them with their own existing gods, such as Aphrodite and Al-'Uzza, mentioned previously on page sixty-nine. Many of the statues found are of gods identified as Greek in origin, such as the Nike figures found both at Petra and Khirbet et-Tannur. But this adoption of the Nike figure is tempered by the way in which the Greek *peplos* is carved

[152] Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 409.
[153] Ibid., 10, 262, 495. Much of Glueck's book provides examples of the mixes of influences upon the statues found at Nabataean sites, especially that of Khirbet et-Tannur.

by the local Nabataean artisan. As Glueck describes it, "In general, however, the pleats of the upper and lower parts of the drapery of the peplos-clad figures of Khirbet Tannur are treated in a rigidly patterned fashion, regardless of different positions and movement of various parts of the body."[154] Unlike the fluidity and grace that characterizes typical Greek statues, Nabataean copies lack the same type of elegance and refinement. This is not to say that they were incapable of such a mastery of the stone. Clearly, from their monumental work, the Nabataeans were capable of delicacy. In their characterization of the Greco-Roman gods they chose to do otherwise. This may be linked to their original representation of their gods, which are simple stone blocks with few anthropomorphic qualities, or it may be a subtle push back on the pressure put on them to conform by their neighbors. In either case, the Nabataeans excelled at taking parts of other cultures and making it their own.

The Nabataeans also used the Hellenistic and Oriental influences pressing upon them to find compromises and employ symbols that are significant to each culture. Deliberate intent is difficult to prove from these remains of material culture, especially because of the lack of written documentation to prove one way or another. It is not unreasonable, however, to theorize that the state would have had some hand in the creation of these works, especially on public buildings. Because the Nabataean economy was so dependent on its external connections, temples, markets, and all public spaces would have to be designed with an eye to those connections. Keeping this need to meld in mind, reliefs with rays of sunlight, possibly representing Zeus-Hadad, are common at many Nabataean sites. Also found quite commonly are dolphin motifs, although it is

[154] Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 446. For information regarding Nabataean statuary and the role of Hellenism and Orientalism upon it, I would direct you to Glueck's book as it is regarded as the leading study of sculpture.

unlikely that the desert-dwelling people east of the Nabataeans would have ever seen a dolphin.[155] Whether or not this was true, the dolphin, along with crab claws, became an attribute of the city's gods and goddesses of Aquileia, Puteoli, Lixus, Mildenhall, Hatra, Antioch, Aphrodisias, Leptis Magna, Ostia, and Pompeii.[156] By finding common ground between the pressures exerted upon them by their trading partners, the Nabataeans were then able to sustain their own individuality by subtly changing how those gods and goddesses were represented, or carved, to fit their style. This style may have had its basis in Near Eastern culture, but it developed a skin of Hellenism and Orientalism in order to preserve its economy.

In one area, the Nabataeans broke away from the Mediterranean completely. The use of the torque, mainly as a decorative feature on the necks of statue figures, is a completely Eastern device. "The Nabataeans seem to have borrowed it from the Parthains, who inherited the domain and geopolitical compulsions of the Persians before them, and who maintained and transmitted many of their artistic and religious traditions."[157] This one decorative device could have been used for a variety of reasons, the first being that the Nabataeans were so influenced by the Parthian use of the torque that they did not care that it was irreconcilable with the Western world.[158] The second is that in this context they had no interest in reconciling it because they liked the piece, felt it was part of their cultural history, and wanted to use it and so exercised the ingenuity and independence they so treasured and did so. It is very possible that the Nabataeans

[155] Ibid., 352-353.
[156] Ibid., 352.
[157] Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 207.
[158] The torque was used by the Celts in the later Greek and Roman periods, but the likelihood of that symbol transmitting itself across Europe to Petra seems unlikely, though not impossible. Glueck makes the case in his book that the particular use of the torque in Nabataean culture is only related to the Parthians, not any Western idea.

made the conscious choice to maintain a part of their Near Eastern origins through the continuation of the torque motif.

Finally, the most recognizably Nabataean part of any Nabataean sculpture is the proportions. As Glueck eloquently states in his section "Distortion by Design,"

> Little importance was attached to fashioning the gods in relationship to normal human dimensions. Purposed distortion was readily resorted to. As already noted, the head of Zeus-Hadad was approximately one third as large as all the rest of his body. It is difficult to believe that the Nabataeans who knew how to paint or carve flowers, leaves, and fruits with such excellence…and were so skillful in creating most delicate and sophisticated types of pottery, could not, had they so desired, have fashioned their deities in accordance with the classical standards of the Hellenistic cultural world, with which they were thoroughly familiar. Certainly they could have approximated these standards more closely than they obviously cared to.[159]

There seems to be no specific reason why the Nabataeans could not have made their statues more proportional. They simply chose not to do so. This may be one of the most obvious indicators of the Nabataean independence—for they may have adopted the gods of their neighbors in order to promote their own socio-political inoffensiveness for trade purposes, but they did not fully give themselves over to any of those outside cultures. In a deliberate choice to keep themselves separate, the Nabataeans managed to stand out in history as holding on to the middle ground against much larger and more powerful opponents.

[159] Ibid., 247.

Terracotta Figurines

One of the lesser known and less studied areas of Nabataean sculpture is that of the terracotta figurines.[160] Although statues were more likely to be a part of a conscious effort to protect the Nabataean unique culture, terracotta figurines would not seem to do the same upon first glance. But the local artisans who crafted them clearly took ideas from other cultures and altered them to their own preferences. Beginning in the ancient Orient, at sites such as Jericho and 'Ain Ghazal Munhata, and evolving through the centuries, terracotta figurines are an established part of material culture. They spread into the Mycenaean world in 1000 BC and by the fourth century BC the Greek style was returning that influence to the Near East.[161] These figurines continue where grander statuary left off, depicting the influence of the Mediterranean world as well as that of the Near East upon Nabataea. The nude goddess figures, the multi-cultural god figures, the theatrical masks, and even the horse and camel figures all show how the Nabataean culture held on to its own identity and crafted an public façade in order to protect the kingdom's interests.

The most common figurine type is that of the nude goddess. This type reflects both a popular image of all Greco-Roman eras, as well as a depiction dating to the Iron Age in Trans-Jordan.[162] The mixing of Greco-Roman and Parthian characteristics in this type of figure is most clearly seen by the variety of styles that have been found. First, the hairstyle that many of the figurines have is reminiscent of a Greco-Egyptian style wig,

[160] A study on terracotta figurines is currently be carried out by Christopher Tuttle, associated with the Joukowsky Institute at Brown University. This is in addition to the work referred to here by Lamia Salem El-Khouri.
[161] Lamia El Khouri, *The Nabataean Terracotta Figurines* (London: Archaeopress, 2002), 1-4.
[162] El Khouri, *The Nabataean Terracotta Figurines*, 9.

which is parted in the center with plaits on each side of the head.[163] This clear Greek influence is offset by the long history of fertility goddesses of the Near East found in similar poses to that of the Petra figurines. "Figurines of the nude enthroned females found at Petra could be the direct descendants of the above-mentioned deity [Ashtar or Ashtaroth]. They represented, however, their own style and exposing their own characteristics."[164] Just as in pottery and statuary, the Nabataeans allowed the influences to flow around them and then deliberately chose which parts they wanted to use. While this choice did not have to have a commercial or political intention, it seems likely that culture so wrapped up in the politico-economic situation surrounding it would not make many decisions without taking it into account.

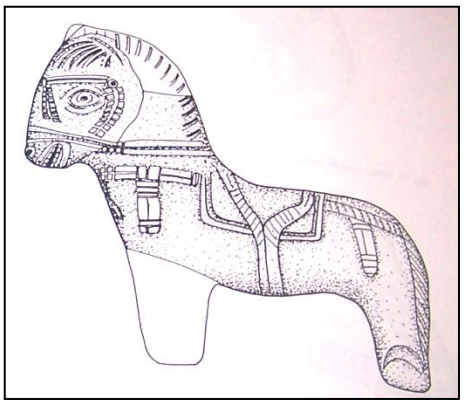
Nelson Glueck stated that the main influence on Nabataea was that of the Greco-Roman world. Some terracotta figurines lend credence to this theory. Figures of both the Greco-Roman god Dionysus and the Egyptian god Bes have been found in Petra.[165] Human types have also been found draped in "a long pleated *himation* extended to the ankles…"[166] Even the theatre masks that are so prominent in the Greek world are found on stone statues seeming to signify tragedy and represent "…the face of death, [which] showed a desire to identify with the divine, and were an expression to reach immortality."[167] The Nabataeans preferred tragedy masks, however, unlike the Greeks who seemed to prefer a greater balance between tragedy and comedy. Even here, in a design so clearly Greek in origin, the Nabataeans find a way to take the original creation of the Greeks and alter it just enough, in this case by preferring tragedy to comedy, to

[163] Ibid., 10.
[164] Idem.
[165] Ibid., 16.
[166] Ibid., 17.
[167] Idem.

link it back to their culture and their beliefs in the afterlife and the divine, which are symbolized by Glueck's "face of death."

Two types of figurines that the Nabataeans produced which showed the animals they revered in their daily lives were those of the camel and the horse (figures 7.5 and 7.6).[168] Horses became a major part of Nabataean life later in the kingdom and especially just before their annexation, when trade fell off and another source of income was needed. In this context, then, it makes sense that this animal was depicted with clear influences from both East and West. "This mixture gave the Nabataean horses a special character, which is observable in all the figurines of the horses with riders."[169] Some aspects are Parthian, unsurprising as the Parthians are known for their horsemanship and especially their skill with the "Parthian Shot." Greco-Egyptian influences can also be seen in both the horse and camel figurines, although Nabataean-made horses always contain more detail in the equipment of the horse than the horse itself.[170]

Figure 7.5 Terracotta Horse



The camel figurines, like the horses, represented real life, not a god they both feared and admired or some vague idea about life after death. The camel was a major part of the Nabataean trade network; without it caravan travel would have been much more difficult and expensive, if not impossible. Also, in the earliest parts of their history, the Nabataeans used camels in war and as trade security, as they were faster on sand and

[168] El Khouri, *The Nabataean Terracotta Figurines*, 135 (Figure 7.5) and 140 (Figure 7.6).
[169] El Khouri, *The Nabataean Terracotta Figurines*, 24.
[170] Idem.

better suited to the harsh desert conditions.[171] Like the horses, camel figurines also had parallels with the Greco-Egyptian style, although they seem to be rooted in earlier Persian types.[172] This is mirrored in the history, when Arabian camels were sent to Egypt for Ptolemaios Philadelphos' victory celebration, which may be "evidence of the good relations between the Ptolemys in Egypt and the Arab tribes in Arabia."[173] Whether or not this is true, trade relations between the two regions did exist and must have influenced one another. The differences between the local Nabataean creations and the Greco-Egyptian, however, show the continued individuality of the Nabataean culture.

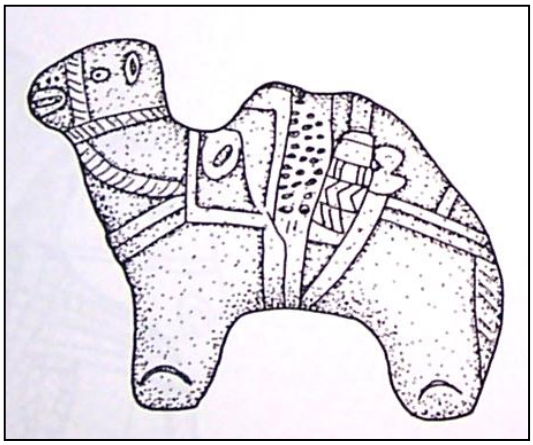


Figure 7.6 Terracotta Camel

While the "minor arts" may not have the same grand impact as monumental sculpture nor take the same amount of planning and forethought, people have preferences based on their own culture and personal influences. That the Nabataean culture managed to incorporate so many influences into their pottery and sculpture, both big and small, and still maintain a unique style that every historian and archaeologist comments upon, is simply stunning. As with the other archaeological evidence left, examples continuously show that the Nabataeans did more than submit to the ever-expanding wave of Hellenism and then Romanism that came to the Near East. Like many Near Eastern kingdoms, Nabataea held on to its own culture, but for much longer than any other. This was due to their ability to hold their own traditions and customs close to them, while deliberately

[171] El Khouri, *The Nabataean Terracotta Figurines*, 25.
[172] Ibid., 29.
[173] Idem.

creating an outer layer that reflected whatever a more powerful nation would find agreeable.

Chapter 8
Language, Script, and Inscriptions

Very few aspects of a culture are more public than the language they speak. The language used by the Nabataeans began as the tongue of the Aramaeans; eventually the script and language was adopted by the Assyrians, and then again by the Persian Empire,[174] and is now understood to be a proto-Arabic dialect. It was in fact Aramaic liberally sprinkled with "Arabisms,"[175] words and phrases indicative of Arabic, but not prevalent enough to change the entirety of the language. The study of the history of the language, its use, and its inscriptions, clarifies the culture of the Nabataeans, as well as the influences upon the kingdom. Aramaic was originally the *lingua franca* of the Near East—the language with which the Nabataeans conducted their business and politics. Gradually, however, Aramaic was edged out of its preeminent position and Greek became the trade language of the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world. The *lingua franca* of a region is the predominant language and in order to be able to communicate effectively with other cultures, especially in business and politics, members of the society must be able to speak this language, in addition to their own. In a culture such as that of the Nabataeans, where trade was the cornerstone of their wealth and power, complete understanding of the common tongue and the ability to adapt to changes in language through the centuries is vital to continued prosperity.

[174] Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans,* 151, and Avraham Negev, *Nabataean Archeology Today*, 2. Figure 8.1 is found in Negev's *Nabataean Archeology Today*, page 18, figure 3.
[175] John F. Healey, ed., *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih*, 59.

The first recording of the Nabataean written language is preserved in Diodorus' account of Antigonus' attack upon the then nomadic people. Diodorus relates that, after revenging themselves upon their attackers, the Nabataeans wrote to Antigonus protesting the attack and stating that instead of enemies they should treat one another as friends.[176] The one detail in Diodorus' telling of these events is that he states that the Nabataeans wrote to Antigonus in "Συρίοις γράμμασι," or "Syrian letters."[177] This is generally understood as the uniquely Nabataean form of Aramaic, although the earliest inscriptional example of this language would not be seen until nearly 150 years after this event, in approximately 164 BC.[178] The development of the written language is easier to follow at this point due to the number of inscriptions that have been found at various Nabataean sites.[179]

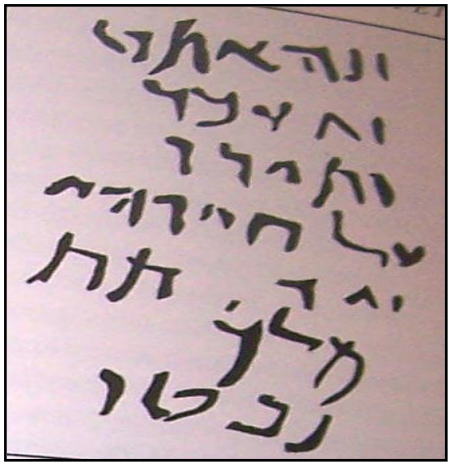


Figure 8.1 Only surviving copy of the oldest known Nabataean inscription.

The stone itself has since disappeared leaving this as the only record. The inscription dates to ca. 164 BC.

A difference in the Nabataean written and spoken language must be mentioned. Aramaic was not the only language spoken in the Near East. Several early forms of

[176] Diodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 19.95-96.1.
[177] Ibid., 19.96.1.
[178] Udi Levi, *The Lost Civilization of Petra*, 50. Inscriptional evidence shows that Nabataean and true Aramaic had some differences, which should categorize them as two separate, but strongly related, languages.
[179] There are two types of Nabataean script—the monumental and the more cursive style that lent itself to ink and papyrus. For the purpose of this thesis, the differences between the two are basically irrelevant and therefore will be mostly put to the side.

Arabic, with the associated regional dialects, also existed. But, as is described by Jane Taylor, "…people who spoke and wrote these different Arabian languages had no direct means of communicating even among each other, let alone with the other language groups with whom they had to deal. Their only mutually comprehensible medium of communication was Aramaic, the lingua franca of the entire Middle East."[180] As has been stated before, in order to be able to trade with the surrounding areas, the Nabataeans had to adopt specific traits, in this case language. In order to facilitate communication with trade partners, the Nabataeans gave up their own particular form of Arabic for Aramaic in public affairs, such as trade and politics.[181] Over time, however, Arabic words, as well as Egyptian, Latin, Greek, Persian, Hebrew, and Akkadian slipped into the surviving written records, which are mostly official in nature, showing that these languages, especially their native Arabic, were still used in the area, spoken by the people themselves, and part of life.[182] The public language may not have coincided with the private language, but there is currently no concrete evidence to prove any theory. If public language was distinct from private, however, it would show even more clearly how the Nabataeans constructed a public façade to aid trade negotiations.

John Healy states, "The intrusion of Arabic syntax [into Nabataean inscriptions] is very significant. It confirms the supposition that the people of the area already spoke some sort of Arabic…However, the issue of Arabic influence in Nabataean is a fairly complicated and enigmatic one. It should it be played down, but its precise nature cannot

[180] Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*¸ 151.
[181] Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*¸ 151 and Starcky, *The Nabataeans: A Historical Sketch*, 87.
[182] Hammond, *The Nabataeans: Their History, Culture and Archeology*, 111.

be clearly established in the absence of contemporary Arabic materials."[183] While nearly impossible to say definitely that the Nabataeans used Arabic in private spaces and Nabataean Aramaic for public functions, Healy suggests that this may be the case. If this is true, a fairly difficult assertion to prove at this juncture, then it would be strong evidence for the idea that the Nabataeans made the deliberate choice to alter the public shell of their culture so that they would not be ignorant of the *lingua franca* and, therefore, disconnected from the neighbors on whom they depended for trade.

The existence of a *lingua franca* in a particular area is in and of itself not impressive. Common languages are necessary for administration of a kingdom that spans several groups of people or to manage goods that pass through certain areas from afar, as was the case for the Nabataeans. Traders or merchants would possibly know this language, if it differed from their own, but middle men—the people who carried the goods far distances or bought and sold goods purely for the profit to be gained from doing so—would have to know this one language in order to conduct their business.[184] The Nabataeans were a society of just such people. As was stated before, Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the Middle East. The Mediterranean regions, however, did not follow in this pattern. In the time of the Ptolemy and Seleucid empires, Greek was more common. While some Greek words did manage to enter into general usage,[185] Aramaic

[183] Healy, *The Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih*, 63. The grammatical error in the last sentence was made in Healy's book and it seems likely that the sentence should actually read, "It should not be played down…"
[184] Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*, 31.
[185] This can be seen by usage of Greek terminology or even bilingual Nabataean and Greek inscriptions in the Nabataean kingdom, namely Petra. Examples of these can be found in *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'In Salih*, edited by John F. Healey (1993). It is also necessary to note that, as "petra" is actually the Greek, not local word, for rock, which is "sela," the name of the Nabataean capital itself is in Greek!

retained its position as the common language until almost 200 years after the Nabataean kingdom was annexed by Rome in 106 CE.

This retention of Aramaic as the official language could be used as evidence for the strength of the Nabataean connection to their Near Eastern roots. It was not until 300 CE that Greek became the predominant written language in what, at that time, used to be the Nabataean kingdom.[186] According to the "Babatha Archive," a collection of legal papers once belonging to a Jewish woman who lived in Petra,[187] written Greek began to be used after the Roman annexation, but was not the main language for some years to come. "…now Greek was the language of the government in the new province, and most official documents were written in it…for the Arabic-speaking, Aramaic-writing Nabataeans, writing Greek was a skill most of them had yet to acquire."[188] Even then, the remaining evidence, mostly inscriptions and graffiti, shows that the Nabataean Aramaic script did not die out—it evolved into the modern Arabic script.

The continuation of the underlying Nabataean culture—even through outside influences, such as Hellenism and Romanism—can be further seen through personal names. A study of hundreds of personal names recovered from inscriptions throughout the Nabataean territory, conducted by Avraham Negev, showed the persistence of the culture even into the Late Roman Period.[189] Negev separates Nabataea into four geographical regions,[190] which allows for a stronger analysis of the types of names found

[186] Negev, *Nabataean Archeology Today*, 109-111.
[187] Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*, 174-180. This archive dates to the mid 2nd century AD and sheds much light on the transition that occurred after the Roman annexation.
[188] Ibid., 181.
[189] Avraham Negev, *Nabataean Archeology Today*, 9-16 and 111-112.
[190] Ibid., 8. Negev explains his reasoning for the division in the following statement. "In the Assyrian and Persian period, long before the Nabateans established their hold on the distant regions of the Hauran and Sinai, they may have constituted a tribe or group of tribes, but the need to establish caravan halts along the routes leading to the Mediterranean, and later to Damascus also…slowly caused the formation of

in each area. By analyzing the number of Nabataean names found in inscriptions versus the number of Greco-Roman names, Negev stated, "The relative isolation and separation of each of the four major Nabatean regions may also be exemplified by the penetration of Greek and Roman names. As might be expected, the largest number of foreign personal names is found at Petra…"[191] Even with the generations of continued contact with outside influences, "good Nabataean" names were consistently used by families. While this may be due to tradition, the naming of children after family members and ancestors, it also shows how strong the Nabataean culture was, even with foreigners having such a strong presence in the metropolis of Petra.

Negev concludes that because of the numbers of personal names that have been found to belong solely to the Nabataeans, they were "an easily identifiable ethnic group until the end of the third century C.E."[192] Over one third of the names found originated from the Nabataean language and do not appear in any other region in Arabia or any other Arab language. He also states that less than one third of the names are of non-Nabataean origin. This shows that people were moving in and out of the area—possibly traders, merchants, political figures, soldiers, and perhaps even people simply looking for a better life. But even with this influx, the Nabataean culture and tradition stayed strong, even as it capitalized on the people and goods in its cities.

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separate Nabatean districts, which account for cultural differences; for differences in religious practices, as evidenced by theophoric personal names particular to each region: and also for the creation of other regional personal names."

[191] Ibid., 9.

[192] Negev, *Nabataean Archeology Today*, 17.

Inscriptions

The first Nabataean inscription dates to 163 BCE and was a dedication in an unknown sanctuary site.[193] After this date, the frequency and variety of Nabataean inscriptions multiplies enormously. Several thousand inscriptions have now been found, including tomb inscriptions, dedicatory statements, trade depictions, and even graffiti and personal statements. These inscriptions provide information about politics, religion, legal documents, and sometimes just say, "I was here." Inscriptions even show the literacy of the population which seems to have been quite high.[194] As was stated by Negev, "Some [inscriptions] were written by highly skilled scribes and priests…others were crudely scribbled by shepherds who could not spell much more than their own names…"[195] In either case, these inscriptions, when added to other forms of archaeological evidence, help to understand more fully the culture of the Nabataeans.

Tomb inscriptions provide a particular type of information, mainly because they did not only give a name to the deceased, but also because they doubled as invocations to divinities and binding legal documents. This point is not truly relevant to proving the cultural façade of the Nabataeans, however, except in that it shows how connected to the Near East the Nabataeans truly were. "…the curse-element…is in line with the general ancient Near Eastern tomb-curse tradition…"[196] The Nabataeans are, at their roots, a Near Eastern civilization, which becomes eminently clear in their tombs and how they

[193] Levi, *The Lost Civilization of Petra*, 50.
[194] Ibid., 30. The multitude of common inscriptions, mostly classified as graffiti, show that a larger than average percentage of people had at least a passing familiarity with the written language so that they were able to reproduce certain phrases at home and at the farthest ends of their trade routes.
[195] Negev, *Nabataean Archeology Today*, 115.
[196] Healey, ed., *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih,* 80.

treat their dead. By invoking specific deities, especially those that reign over overlapping regions, the Nabataeans show the way in which they retain their cultural identity.

One such tomb inscription is from Mada'in Salih and decorates a tomb façade. Created for "Hawshabu son of Naflyu son of Alkuf," it states that the tomb itself is "inviolable according to the nature of inviolability among the Nabataeans and Salamaians for ever. And may Dushara curse anybody who buries in this tomb anyone except those inscribed above, or sells it, or buys it, or gives it in pledge, or leases it, or makes a gift of it, or disposes of it."[197] This calling upon the god to protect the sanctity of the tomb and its inhabitants connects the culture back to its Near Eastern roots where the "curse element" of tomb is quite regular.[198] Very common on Nabataean tombs, these prayers reveal the importance of the gods in life and death as well as enlightening historians as to the traditions which continued down through generations—traditions preserved in the written style, the use of language and the content of each passage.

The second most common type of inscription is the personal inscriptions, which could also be labeled graffiti due to their unprofessional and individual nature. These vary from tomb inscriptions because they are not professionally rendered nor are they dedicatory in nature. Most of these inscriptions are found along caravan routes, which indicates that merchants and traders scratched them out as they completed their arduous

[197] Ibid., 68.
[198] Ibid., 80.

treks across the desert. This particular inscription is no different from thousands of

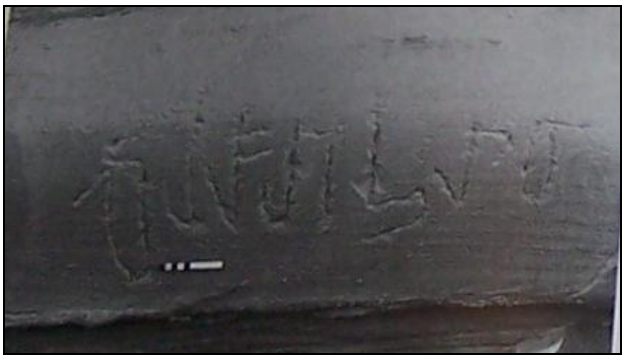

Figure 8.2

Personal inscription "carved on a rock-face on the route between the Deir plateau" and Petra. It reads, "May Aslah be safe and sound."

others that have been found.[199] Varying little in wording and context, personal inscriptions provide information about names and beliefs of the Nabataeans. They also show the distances that were covered by Nabataean merchants and that, even far from home and bombarded with foreign influences, they retained their culture and their language.

Later in Nabataean history, from approximately the third century CE, several bilingual inscriptions have also been found. Using both the Nabataean script and ancient Greek, these inscriptions show how the Nabataeans retained their own identity while also familiarizing themselves with the foreigners that flowed in and out of their capital city. This particular inscription, found at Petra in the Bab es-Siq, the main route into the center of the city, contains three lines of Nabataean and two lines of ancient Greek. The transliteration, as compiled by John Healy, is as follows:[200]

[199] M.C.A. Macdonald, "Languages, Scripts, and the Uses of Writing among the Nabataeans," in *Petra Rediscovered*, 38. Figure 8.2 is also found in Macdonald, page 39, figure 20.

[200] Healy, *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih*, 243. The translation for figure 8.3's inscription from Healy's work is: 'Abdmanku son of Akayus son of Shullay son of 'Utayhu….build this burial-monument (for himself) and his descendants and their descendants for ever and ever (in the year…) of Maliku, during his lifetime. [shift to Greek] Abdomanchos son of (Ach)aios made this (funeral) monument for (himself) and for his (chi)ldren."

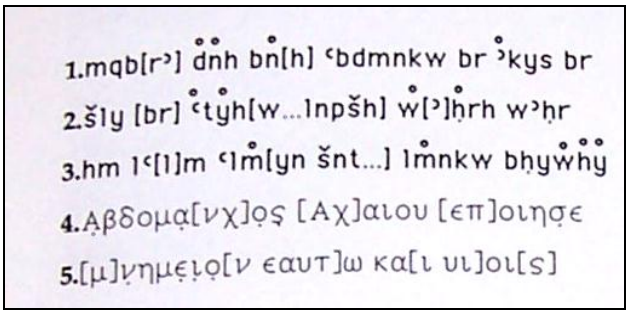
1.mqb[rʾ] d̊n̊h bn̊[h] ʿbdmnkw br ʾkys br
2.šly [br] ʿtẘh[w...lnpšh] ẇ[ʾ]ḥrh wʾḥr
3.hm lʿ[l]m ʿlm̊[yn šnt...] lm̊nkw bḥyẇ̊hẙ
4.Αβδομα[νχ]ος [Αχ]αιου [επ]οιησε
5.[μ]νημεῖο[ν εαυτ]ω κα[ι υι]οι[ς]

Figure 8.3

Bilingual Inscription from Petra in Ancient Greek and Nabataean

The Hellenistic influence in the area has already been well attested, but this shows once again that the Nabataeans combined the traditional with outside forces in a unique way.

In order to sustain their trade empire, the people and the government of the Nabataean kingdom had to be able to take outside influences into their lives. The people did so through their use of Aramaic which strengthened the public façade, while possibly continuing also to use Arabic in their private lives. The state controlled the public façade of the whole kingdom, but never let that disguise go so far as to erase the unique qualities of Nabataea. This was the impressive feat, being able to do both without losing their own identity. The Nabataean language mirrored the *lingua franca* of their region, by using Aramaic, but also incorporated those parts that made them individual, "Arab-isms". With the increase of outside influences, they also managed to shift and move with the times in order to trade better with foreigners—both in their capital, as shown by the multilingual inscriptions in Petra, and at the farthest ends of the trade routes, seen as the personal inscriptions in Aramaic throughout the Near East. The Nabataean language survived until two hundred years after the kingdom lost its independence, which stands as a testament to the strength of the Nabataean cultural character.

Chapter 9
Numismatics

Unlike most material culture, such as architecture, pottery, and statuary, coins are completely designed by the state and are used for political, as well as economic, purposes. Styles are set by conscious choice and are not subject entirely to an artist's whims, although variations must be taken into account for level of skill and some artistic license. Nabataean numismatics shows the evolution of the Nabataean kingdom—from the original Hellenistic beginnings of their coinage to the fall of the kingdom's prosperity and independence. By analyzing the designs, inscriptions, lettering, and material make-up of Nabataean coins, the individuality of Nabataea reveals itself.

Nabataean coinage began in the first century BCE[201] and seems to be a consequence of the movement into a sedentary, trade-based lifestyle. Not until several generations after the Nabataeans appear in the historical record as a nomadic people are they, as a state, prepared to move away from a barter system into a money-based economy. Ya'akov Meshorer in his book *Nabataean Coins* states that "…the issuance of coins [is] undoubtedly all an expression of the general political and social development of the Nabataeans at this period."[202] He continues explaining that the expansion of Roman domination in the Near East under Pompey set up conditions that allowed for the first Nabataean minting of coins. With the beginning of Nabataean dominance as commercial

[201] Browning, *Petra*, 43 and Ya'akov Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins* (Jerusalem: University of Jerusalem, 1975), 2-3.
[202] Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, 3.

middle men in the Near East, as well as military actions that required coin on hand, coinage became a necessary both for local and "international" purposes.

Foreign coins were used in the Nabataean sphere of influence long before separate Nabataean minting began.[203] These coins were replaced by the purely Nabataean coins that came after. In between these two periods, however, was a type of transitional period in which Hellenistic coins were used, in their entirety, as the basis for the newly developed Nabataean minting. It has been suggested that a group of "rather common carelessly-made coins" could be the earliest of the Nabataean issue, issued near the end of the second century BCE.[204] "These curious coins appear to be imitated from such

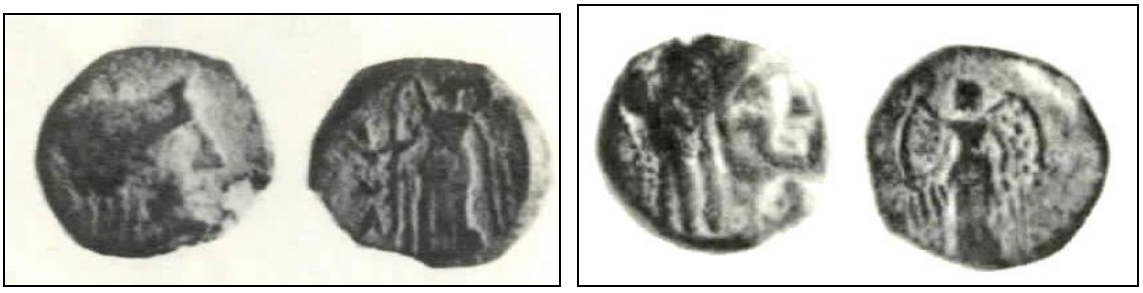

Figure 9.1 Two coins of the earliest Nabataean issue, end of the second century BCE

an original as the bronze of Alexander Bala [a Seleucid king] with the king's head helmeted and a Nike reverse type…not without influence from the gold stater of Alexander the Great…"[205] As can be seen in the examples above, figure 9.1, a head can be seen on the obverse (left) side and a figure of Nike decorates the reverse (right) side.[206] This design is essentially lifted from the Hellenistic coins that were produced in Seleucid-controlled Syria, one of the most powerful kingdoms near Nabataea, pictured in

[203] Ibid., 3.
[204] Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, 10-11. This idea was first presented by E.S.G. Robinson in 1936 and his idea is supported by Meshorer. There is no direct proof that these coins are the earliest of the Nabataean coinage, but analysis done by Meshorer places them in the time period of Aretas II. Generally, they are not considered the first Nabataean coins, which do not occur until the 1st century BCE.
[205] Ibid., 10.
[206] Figure 9.1 is taken from Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, Plate 1, Coin number 1 and 1A.

figure 9.2.[207] The obverse design, on both types of coins, is very similar, although the hair styles differ based on the kingdom of origin. The reverse, however, is nearly identical on all three coins shown. The image of Nike, standing with her wings shown behind her while she looks to the left, is copied almost perfectly. This similarity could be attributed to a common preference for Grecian imagery, but that seems unlikely as the Nabataeans had adopted very little Greek iconography at this point in their history. More likely, this adoption of the whole design strategy shows the Nabataean focus on its neighbors at a time when it was just starting to create its own trade network upon which to build the kingdom. Only a few years later, Nabataean kings began, as they did in every other area of culture, to design a uniquely Nabataean flourish on an old system.

Figure 9.2 Coin of Demetrius II

During the time of the next Nabataean king, Aretas III, political, social, and economic conditions created the perfect atmosphere for Nabataea to create its own monetary system. "With the decline of these super-powers, of the Seleucids in the north and the Ptolemies in the south, the states and small city-states in the East began to act as political entities…This

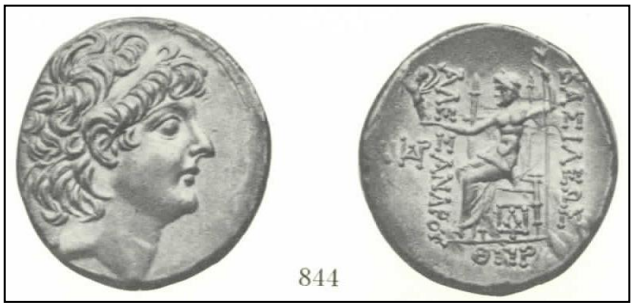

Figure 9.3 Coin minted at Damascus

[207] Figure 9.2 is taken from Arthur Amory Houghton, *Coins of the Seleucid Empire from the Collection of Arthur Houghton* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1983), Plate 13, Coin number 230. This is a coin from the first reign of Demetrius II, approximately between 147 and 139 BCE. The figure of Nike clearly visible on the reverse of the coin is nearly identical to the Nabataean counterparts of the second century BCE.

expressed itself in the autonomous minting of coins…"[208] Continuing the intermediate period described above, the earliest coins made by Aretas III copied previous Seleucid coins as well, namely those made in Damascus, shown in figure 9.3,[209] which was under Nabataean rule at this time. Imitation of the Seleucid coins is in no way limited to Nabataea—in fact all coins first minted in the Near East follow the form of Seleucid and Ptolemaic coins. This was done in order to create legitimacy, a "more official character" for the coins that would not develop without linking new issues to older forms.[210]

These coins were not meant to be circulated in Nabataea as a whole, but only in Damascus, which was under control of Aretas III for a period of time.[211] The design of these coins did not change except to exchange the face of its former leaders to that of Aretas on the obverse side. The reverse of the coin holds the image of Tyche of Damascus, seen above, and an inscription in Greek, although the inscription changed with the ruler. "Like the more famous Tyche of Antioch…she is seated, turreted, on a rock, while beneath her feet is depicted the swimming figure of the river Chrysaroas…she holds a cornucopiae in her 1. arm, and stretches the r. straight out before her…"[212] This type of coin continued to be minted even after Aretas III and the Nabataeans no longer had control of the city. Tigranes, king of Armenia, only minted a few coins when he gained control of the city, but these coins followed the same pattern as

[208] Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, 9.
[209] Houghton, *Coins of the Seleucid Empire*, Plate 50, Coin number 844. This is one of the many coins minted by Seleucid rulers of Damascus, featuring several of the symbols copied by Near Eastern kingdoms after the deterioration of Seleucid and Ptolemaic power.
[210] Ibid., 11.
[211] Ibid., 14.
[212] E.T. Newell, *Late Seleucid Mints in Ake-Ptolemais and Damascus* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1939), 93-94.

those of Aretas and previous rulers.[213] It may be that Damascus simply stands alone in the history of minting in the region, as all of its coins have a distinctive style that is not replicated in the surrounding regions. Alternately, these could show how the Nabataean minting process was originally dependent on the coins that surrounded them, but was able to break away from these patterns after becoming fully acquainted with the process.

The first coins from Nabataea to have a distinct Nabataean character were minted under the reign of Aretas III and are dated between 84 and 71 BCE.[214] These are distinguished by the bust of Aretas in what is known as "archaic" style, but are still linked to the coins of poorer quality from the previous era. The son of Aretas III, Obodas II, made changes to Nabataean coinage, during his reign from 62 to 60 BCE, which began to separate it from the previous Hellenistic imitations. These coins are rare, but each one found depicts an element that had not been seen before and would become the dominant feature in later Nabataean coinage— portraits of both the king and queen.[215] This era, which just preceded the "Golden Age" of Petra,[216] saw the switch to Nabataean inscriptions replacing the use of Greek inscriptions or coins without any lettering at all. But, even with these individualities, imitation was still present. The silver coins were a "half-shekel" and modeled on the Tyrian shekel that dominated the Near Eastern currency.[217] Even the design of the eagle on the reverse of the coins is taken directly

[213] Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, 14. These coins also, when they had inscriptions, bore the letter A which could have stood for the Greek spelling of "ΑΡΕΤΑΣ," showing the continuing Greek influence, even though the language of the Nabataeans was Aramaic.
[214] Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, 12 and Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 25.
[215] Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, 16.
[216] Starcky, "The Nabataeans: A Historical Sketch," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 18 (1955): 92.
[217] Ibid., 17-18. "During this period the main coins in the commerce of the Near East were the Tyrian shekel and half-shekel, and from their first appearance in 125 B.C.E. until they ceased to be minted in 55 C.E. they were the principal currency represented in most of the hoards of silver coins found in Palestine and Syria. It is therefore not surprising that the Nabataean coins should have imitated the Tyrian shekel."

from the Tyrian shekel, although that does not mean that the eagle itself had no meaning to the Nabataeans.

The part of the Obodas II coins that is significant to the numismatic history is the letters, which were mentioned above. Beyond being inscribed with the first Aramaic letters, these coins are also generally archaic, being "square and angular, the lines tend to be straight and firm, and the writing is largely calligraphic and reminiscent of stone engraving."[218] This style of lettering changes throughout the evolution of Nabataean minting, showing how the kingdom evolved its style and design to be more stylistically appealing while maintaining its economic usefulness.

Obodas II seemed to use his coins for political reasons—since coins minted in his time are rare, the theory points to the coins having a commemorative use, as well as the surplus of other coinage available at the time, which would be easier and less expensive for the kingdom to use. Malichus I, his successor, on the other hand, minted far more coins and of different types, including the first Nabataean bronze coins. Most notable of the coins from this period, 60 to 30 BCE, are the beginnings of truly Nabataean designs—the eagle, the cornucopiae, and the palm of a hand. While the eagle was originally just a copy of the Tyrian design, Meshorer argues that by this point "the eagle on the coins may already have been regarded as having a specifically Nabataean religious significance."[219] Also, the two cornucopiae were derived from Hellenistic culture, but they became a dominant Nabataean design until the end of independent minting. The cornucopiae seems to have even become the symbol of one of the main Nabataean goddesses, as it did for Demeter and Tyche. Lastly is a symbol that has no basis in the

[218] Ibid., 19.
[219] Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, 24-25.

Hellenistic world, the palm, shown in figure 9.4.[220] "It is in fact the first and almost the only exclusively Nabataean design in Nabataean numismatics. The extended palm of the raised hand had a distinctly religious and ceremonial significance in the life of the Nabataeans."[221] The three designs that become so prominent during this period both reflect the influences with which the Nabataeans contended, as well as the spirit of individuality which colored all Nabataean achievements.

Figure 9.4 Coin of Malichus I

While the bust of Malichus I has been obscured, the palm of the hand is clearly visible on the reverse (right) side of the coin.

Another purely Nabataean feature occurs under Malichus I and continues during the times of Obodas III and Aretas IV—the letter and the mark. The letter, resembling ח, and the mark, a plain circle ○, have not been fully explained. The only explanation so far supported by any possible evidence is the idea that the Nabataeans used ח as a monogram and stands for the "mint-master" or some other person of esteem. On the other hand, the mark ○ has "no Nabataean context other than coins." Meshorer suggests that this is the mark of the minting site, Petra.[222] In fact the actual meanings of both of these

[220] Figure 9.4 is taken from Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, Plate 2, coins of Malichus I.
[221] Ibid., 25.
[222] Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, 27. This idea is based on some linguistic supposition. "We have previously suggested that Petra, the capital of the Nabataean kingdom, was the natural site for a mint, and we should therefore expect to find some link between this mark and Petra. Indeed such a link exists. Petra was known to the Nabataeans as Reqem. In Aramaic, Reqem means a stain, a spot, a (circular) piece of embroidery. Although there are no specific instances in which the word Reqem means a circle, the connection between one and the other meanings of the word—a stain, a spot—points to a possible identity between the circle and the name Reqem." While this evidence may be more speculative than

inscriptions have been lost, but their very presence on the coins shows a further development for the Nabataeans which separates them from their previous dependence on Hellenistic designs.

With the end of the Hellenistic period a shift occurred in Nabataean minting that may have been directed by the rising Roman influence in the region. Under the king Obodas III, who ruled from 30 BCE to 9 BCE, a Roman economic policy spread across the Near East and possibly affected the unusual change that came to Nabataean minting. Nabataean coins at this time broke away from the previous weight system and weighing 4.4 grams, on average, became "incompatible with all of the contemporary monetary systems…the new coin could serve no logical function in the system of the shekel, or to the later and lighter Seleucid drachms…, or to the Greek drachms of Lycia…"[223] These systems of coinage were fading, however, with the growing influence of Rome. But, these new Nabataean coins were even different from the Roman denarii, which weighed 3.8 grams, on average. "Although the Nabataean coins are about 17% heavier than the Roman denarii, their silver content is 17% less. Accoringly, the absolute value of these Nabataean coins is very nearly the same as that of the Roman denarii…We regard this issue as an attempt to introduce into the Nabataean market a substitute for the Roman coin."[224] At this time, the still independent kingdom of Nabataea had to make adjustments in its own policies and monetary system in order to stay competitive in trade in the increasingly Roman world. Being a small kingdom in comparison to some of its neighbors, Nabataea needed to be able to fit in with the overall economic framework and

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fact-based, no other, more promising or supported theory has been set forth and so readers are forced to accept this as the explanation for the mark, for now.

[223] Ibid., 29.

[224] Ibid., 29-30.

in this case that meant having coinage that would substitute for Roman coins. They did not wholly adopt Roman characteristics. Instead they preserved their own unique identity and designs, but made smaller changes in order to stay current.

During the reign of Obodas III, several other changes occurred in relation to the designs which decorated the coins. The eagle that had decorated nearly all Nabataean coins up to this point finally disappeared, which could show the waning influence of Tyre and the Hellenistic system that birthed the Nabataean coins. Also, the appearance of the double cornucopiae shows an evolution of the original Hellenistic symbol of fertility. Finally, an entirely new design was created—a woman standing with her arm raised and palm facing outward, depicted in figure 9.5. "She is draped in a long garment, and around her waist wears a girdle, whose ends hang down at the sides; on her head is a veil. The woman raises her right hand with its palm extended."[225] Possibly a queen or even a goddess, she is clearly connected to the earlier symbol of the palm decorating coins as early as the mid-first century BCE. This design continues through the coins of Aretas IV and at one point is identified as the queen of Aretas, Shuqailat.[226] Whether or not this standing figure is the queen, it clearly demonstrates how the Nabataeans expressed their own culture and preferences on their material culture.

Figure 9.5 Coin of Obodas III

This coin clearly depicts the woman standing with one hand in front, palm facing outwards, on the reverse (left) side of the coin.

[225] Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, 34.
[226] Ibid., 34-35. Figure 9.5 is taken from Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, Plate 3, Coins of Obodas III.

The height of the Nabataean kingdom, culturally, politically and economically, fell during the reign of Aretas IV, who ruled from 9 BCE to 40 CE. The great number of coins that survive from this era of prosperity demonstrates this. Eight out of ten coins found were minted during the time of Aretas IV.[227] Ya'akov Meshorer divided these coins into groups and then into subgroups, which allows for an extremely detailed understanding of development and make-up of these coins. In order not to repeat those ideas in their entirety, some generalizations will suffice in this section to show the peak of Nabataean numismatics and how this reflected cultural independence within the kingdom. By looking specifically at the design changes, representations of the king and queens, and lettering, the continuing independent core of the Nabataean culture is revealed.

While the coins from the end of the first year of Aretas IV's reign are "distinguished for their beauty,"[228] his reign begins with relatively unskilled workmanship. This is quickly replaced with the more typical beautiful coins, with each side decorated with a single head, king on the obverse and queen on the reverse. These designs are different from their predecessors, mainly due to the laurel wreath upon the head of the king decorated with a "V" which is a new and totally unique addition to the Nabataean stock of images.[229] After the first few years of Aretas' reign, more variation begins to appear in the reverse of the coins. Huldu, the first queen, the eagle, a wreath, the cornucopiae, and Shuqailat, the second queen, all appear. The designs not related to the queens could be due to the time between the death of Huldu and the crowning of Shuqailat, during which some other design was needed to represent the kingdom which

[227] Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, 41.
[228] Ibid., 43.
[229] Ibid.

had no queen. Also, during the period between these two queens, the cornucopiae on the reverse had its paired symbol, the caduceus, switched to a pomegranate. While the exact reason for such a change is unknown, and do not seem to be linked specifically to trade or political issues, the only other coins that use a pomegranate are the Hasmonaeans, again showing the individuality of Nabataean design preferences.[230]

If one pays specific attention to the images of the king and queens, other differences become apparent. The image of Aretas IV does not differ that greatly from the king images that came before him. His head does show a shift from the "archaic" to "new" form, which is epitomized by a more stylized and less rigid appearance, especially noticeable in the hair of the bust. "In the earlier, 'archaic' form, the hair is diademed, falls straight down onto the nape of the neck and covers the ears; a robe is wrapped around the shoulders…In the later, 'new' form, the diadem is replaced by a laurel wreath [mentioned above], and the hair is longer and curlier. Only the head is shown, without the shoulders and the robe."[231] This shift, however, can be accounted for by an evolution of style and ability of the artists. This shift is also seen in the busts of the first queen Huldu, who is depicted wearing a veil, which is very crudely drawn but becomes "delicately delineated" after some time.

Coins depicting Huldu are considerably rarer than those of Shuqailat, the second queen of Aretas IV, who first appears in 18 CE. Differences exist between their coins as well. First, Shuqailat's name appears inscribed on nearly every coin along with a bust or standing image of her. Also, she is associated with the queen or goddess standing with her palm out (mentioned and shown above) because of an inscription of her name

[230] Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, 59.
[231] Ibid., 43.

alongside one of these drawings. This shift could show an increased importance of women in the Nabataean hierarchy. The increase of inscriptions on the coins could also show the increasing proficiency of the artists' abilities. While the kingdom flourished under Aretas IV, the coins became more refined and detail-oriented. They were not just useful pieces of the economy, but were works of art in and of themselves, which was reflected in the changes made to the queens.

The letterings on the coins of Aretas IV "represent an intermediate epigraphic stage."[232] Obodas II and Malichus I had very clear archaic elements to their lettering, which is not present on those coins of Aretas. But they also do not have the development of the later coins of Rabbel II. This is not uncommon in a culture, for letters and writing styles to evolve over time as they are used more and more. What is most notable about this particular set of letters, however, is that one letter did stay exactly the same. Throughout all of Nabataean minting and history, the letter ח "occurs in a uniform shape throughout."[233] Even though the meaning of this letter is unknown on the coins, although it may be a mint-mark as stated by Meshorer, it is clearly important enough that it did not reshape over time. 'Archaic,' 'classic,' or 'new,' none of these evolutions affected this one letter. This could be another demonstration of the "traditional" Nabataean culture holding firm, even though it must as a whole progress with time. This letter had a significant, if unknown, meaning which kept it from following the progression of the rest of the alphabet.

The last two rulers of Nabataea faced an inexorable decline that ended with the cessation of Nabataean minting and the Roman annexation in 106 CE. This decline is

[232] Ibid., 62.
[233] Ibid.

mimicked in the coins produced in the last 60 years of Nabataean independence. The coins started to decrease in size as well as artistic quality. During the reign of Malichus II, from 40 to 70 CE, the coins were smaller than the designs stamped on them, leading to coins where parts of the previous beautiful and artistic designs are cut off without any attempt at elegance.[234] This continued on with Malichus II's successor, Rabbel II, whose coins, while more classic in character and not as poorly made as his father's, were still "crudely made: the standard of their execution is low, the lines are rough and thick, and the features of the king and queen, as engraved by the die-cutters, are not very flattering."[235] Nabataea's power and prominence was declining rapidly, as can be seen by the falling quality of the coinage issued. Without the money and power to back its own currency and the increasing presence of Rome as the only major power in the Near East with its own more stable currency, Nabataea had little chance of continuing its former glory.

Possibly the best example of the Nabataean decline is reflected in the silver content of its coinage. Beginning with numbers in the mid 90%s and ending with a silver content in the 20%s,[236] it is clear that Nabataea no longer had the ability to support itself. With the Roman pressure from the West and the trade moving to sea routes, the Nabataeans lost their niche in the Near Eastern goods market.

Figure 9.6 Silver Content of Nabataean Coinage

King Name	Year	Date	Silver Content	Coin Number

[234] Ibid., 66.
[235] Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, 76.
[236] Ibid., 73-74. Information for this table, figure 9.6, is a sample of the data provided in Meshorer's *Nabataean Coins*. What is provided here is only part of the data he composed and is intended to show the general decline of the silver content in Nabataean coins. For more information and the complete chart with coins catalogued in the back, see *Nabataean Coins*.

Obodas II	60 BCE	Year 3	96%, 87%	11, 11A
Malichus I	35 BCE	Year 26	91%	12
Obodas III	28 BCE	Year 3	93.5%, 85%	21
	23 BCE	Year 8	73%	28
	11 BCE	Year 20	65.5%	38
Aretas IV	9 BCE	Year 1	68%, 70%	46, 47A
	8 BCE	Year 2	47%	51
	7 BCE	Year 3	73%	52
	18 CE	Year 27	39%	96
	27 CE	Year 36	34%	105
	35 CE	Year 44	38%, 20%	108
Malichus II	42 CE	Year 3	40.5%	124
	50 CE	Year 11	20%	132
	61 CE	Year 22	20%	138
Rabbel II	70 CE	Year 1	20%	142
	73 CE	Year 4	40.5%	145
	78 CE	Year 9	42%	148
	86 CE	Year 17	20%	151
	93 CE	Year 24	20%	156
	100 CE	Year 31	20%	160

Even with this decline in monetary and political power, culture managed to continue. The very presence of hoards of Nabataean coins shows that not all of the

material culture was reconfigured to reflect the Roman dominance of the Near East. Even though the coins would not be useful in the new Roman economic system, except possibly melted down for their silver, they continued to last as people stored them and kept them, possibly as reminders of a system that had since been overtaken.[237] Coins help to reconstruct much of the Nabataean history that would otherwise be entirely dependent on sources that are patchy at best. By evaluating the designs and inscriptions on coins and how they changed over time, historians are able to understand the current of individuality and center of cultural strength that defines the Nabataeans. Especially the use of unique symbols, namely that of the standing woman and the palm of the hand, create a difference between the Nabataeans and the cultures with whom they dealt.

[237] In fact, it seems that Nabataean coins were overlaid with Roman impressions and recycled, so it seems significant that some were kept out of circulation, possibly in a deliberate attempt to preserve some of them.

Conclusion

The Nabataeans were, without a doubt, an impressive people. Their ability to control a trade route and to create wealth that was the envy of all its neighbors, to defend their lands, to craft spectacular monuments that last to the modern day, and to hold onto the culture of their nomadic past, even as the rest of their world drastically changed, exemplifies this. The traditional way in which to deal with the external pressure that came from more powerful states was simply to absorb their cultural aspects and become like them. The Nabataeans managed to find another way, arguably even better, since they were independent longer. The Nabataeans created an external façade for the politics and social interactions of the kingdom in order to make themselves look more attractive to trade partners and less threatening to powerful neighbors. This was just a façade, however, because at their core they held onto their own traditions and values, resisting a total overhaul of the culture.

Through their history, from nomadic to sedentary population, the Nabataeans avoided conflict when possible, because trade cannot flourish in unstable times. Only peace promotes the movement of goods on which the kingdom so heavily relied. Drawing on the culture of their trading partners, from both the East and the West, the Nabataeans intentionally constructed an outer shell which allowed them to commingle with other peoples with less friction. Trade connections between the Far East (India and China to some extent) and Egypt and the southernmost parts of the Arabian Peninsula to

Italy and Greece brought wealth into the kingdom, but also created situations in which political diplomacy was necessary for successful business. It seems unlikely that the Nabataeans, who were thriving traders and merchants, would not have had the political prowess to do whatever was necessary to protect their interests. Adopting aspects of a foreign culture as a shield would be a small concession to the wealth and power they would gain by doing so.

Beginning with hydraulics, the Nabataeans very early had a grasp of how adopting ideas from other cultures was beneficial to their own success. While the hydraulic system may not seem as strongly related to culture as other types of material evidence, it shows a clear pattern of taking whatever was needed, modifying it to fit the exact needs of the kingdom, and putting it to use. Later, once the Nabataeans started their monumental building projects, their aptitude for carving shows their ability to assimilate further the motifs and designs of other cultures, but also to add that unique Nabataean twist. By slightly altering foreign designs the Nabataeans were able at once to assimilate and separate themselves. Large state-run public works, such as the funerary monuments that decorate Petra, were clearly under the control, or supervision at least, of the rulers of the kingdom, and therefore, the assumption an intentional use of traditional Nabataean patterns throughout the works, even though usually mixed with outside manipulations, is readily visible. Although it is much harder to prove deliberate intent on items which are smaller in size and larger in distribution, the unique Nabataean flair also appears in these more common goods. Pottery and statuary followed this similar pattern, but demonstrated it through the imports from foreign states and the local copies of those imports. Convenience may have overcome the need to maintain tradition. The

Nabataean production of these goods still remained, however, and slightly altered the goods from the foreign prototypes.

Coins from the Nabataean kingdom are a special case, mainly because they relied so heavily on Hellenistic examples and were eventually able to break away from those examples so thoroughly. By the end of the kingdom's independence, the coins minted there looked nothing like those with which they started. Coins provide information which is based on their status as entirely state-controlled materials. Designs and language used on the coins must be an intentional choice because they have to reflect the ideologies of the local home culture, as well as being accessible to foreign consumers. The Nabataean coins manage this by using symbols with solely local meaning, but their size and worth was comparable to coins from other regions.

While not material in nature, religion and language also show this trend. The use of the Nabataean form of Aramaic, before and during the time Aramaic was the *lingua franca*, and the later switch to Greek, after the annexation by Rome and in keeping with the shifting language patterns in the region, points to a culture that was again able to take a necessary aspect of trade interconnection and make it their own. This also applies to religion. The Nabataean pantheon was expanded to absorb Eastern and Western deities, but never completely moved away from the worship of local gods, goddesses, and god blocks. The most persuasive argument for this could be the persistence of the god Shay' al-Quam, the original nomadic god of the Nabataeans, long past the end of the nomadic aspect of the society.

Reconstructing a culture and, especially, proving deliberate intent from the fragments of archaeological remains and the written records of people with their own

biases and agendas is a delicate process, at best. The Nabataeans speak for themselves, however, and tell of a people who were pushed on all sides but held their own. Preserving their own culture and creating the façade of a metropolis exemplifies the constant give and take that the Nabataeans had to manage in order to survive. Through the crafty machinations of men like the minister Syllaeus, the kingdom was able to present a front to all its trade partners that allowed for the open movement of goods through an inhospitable territory. Until the discovery of trade winds which opened the seas, Nabataea held the most power over goods of any kingdom in its time. Sustaining a strong inner core of independence was essential to continuing the freedom that defined the nomadic Nabataeans and their settled descendants. A powerful state cannot bend with every outside influence. It must be able to take everything into itself without compromising its own foundation or causing offense. A tall order, but one that Nabataea carried out until 106 CE, when trade could no longer sustain it, and Rome handed it its final loss of freedom.

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